

# Chapter 11

## Boomers, Sooners, and Oklahoma Territory



### Chapter Preview

#### TERMS

Dawes Severalty Act,  
Curtis Act, boomer,  
rider, squatter, sooner,  
Organic Act, township,  
normal school

#### PEOPLE

Chitto Harjo, Elias C.  
Boudinot, David L. Payne,  
George W. Steele,  
Thompson B. Ferguson

#### PLACES

Unassigned Lands,  
Oklahoma City, Guthrie,  
Langston, Greer County,  
Cimarron Territory

This painting by Wayne Cooper, titled *Oklahoma City—April 29, 1889 Seven Days after the Land Run of 1889*, is on display in the State Capitol building.

# A

s early as the 1860s, some people in the United States were looking towards the Indian Territory as “one of the most desirable regions on the continent.” A *New York Times* reporter wrote of the “necessity of some arrangement being made advantageous to the Indians, as well as to the prospective white settlers, in the splendid region designated the Indian Territory. The necessities of our Western growth demand the useful occupation of this region, and we believe it is possible to secure it.”



# Signs of the Times

## NEWS

In 1884, a ten-story building in Chicago became the world's first true "skyscraper."

The Washington Monument was dedicated in 1885 after thirty-six years of construction, and the Statue of Liberty was dedicated in New York harbor in 1886.

## HOW PEOPLE LIVED

Bicycles had evolved through several stages, but by the 1890s they were mass produced and used by men for transportation and by both men and women for leisure. The bicycle craze helped bring an end to the bustle and corset for women, as bloomers and "common-sense dressing" increased women's mobility. Fashion took another huge step forward with the marketing of the "clasp locker" or zipper by Whitcomb Judson in 1893.

## INVENTIONS

Several people had a hand in the evolution of the motion picture, but the Frenchman Louis Lumiere is credited with inventing the first motion picture camera in 1895. Lumiere's invention included a portable motion picture camera, film processing unit, and projector called the Cinematographe.

## LITERATURE

Mark Twain published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1884 and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* in 1889.

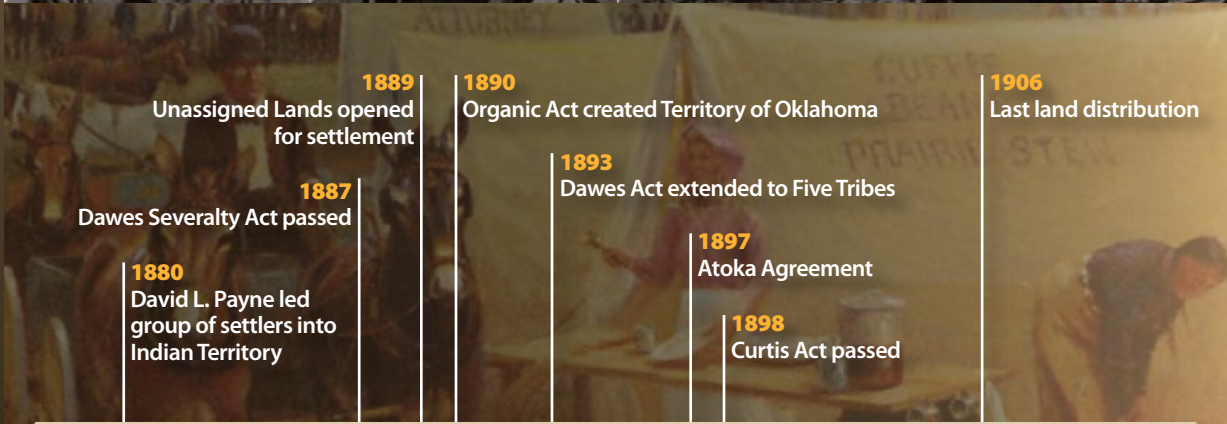
## GAMES

America's first roller coaster, with a top speed of 6 mph, began operating at Coney Island in New York City in 1884. Canadian James Naismith is credited with inventing basketball in 1891.

## FIRSTS

The first self-service restaurant opened in New York City. The first Tournament of Roses Parade was held in Pasadena, California.

## Figure 12 Timeline: 1880–1910



# Section 1

## Dissolving a Way of Life

### As you read, look for

- the steps taken by the federal government to break up the Indian nations in the late 1800s,
- land allotments to the Five Civilized Tribes, and
- vocabulary terms **Dawes Severalty Act, Curtis Act, boomer, rider, squatter, and sooner.**



**Senator Henry Dawes's intention was to create independent farmers out of Indians—to give them land and the tools for citizenship.**

### In 1870, federal policy toward Native Americans began

to change from removal, treaties, and reservations to breaking up the Indian nations. An 1870 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the Cherokee tobacco case stated that federal laws took precedence over treaties. In 1871, Congress passed a law stating no new treaties would be made with Indian tribes, since they were no longer sovereign nations. Indians' rights were severely affected by the law, since negotiations were no longer needed for Congress to make changes in Native American matters.

### The Dawes Act

In the 1880s, several people with sincere intentions believed that it was in the best interests of the Native Americans to allot their tribal lands to individual tribal members. A reform group known as Friends of the Indians, led by Alice Fletcher of New York, worked with Massachusetts Senator Henry Dawes, chairman of the Congressional Indian Affairs Committee, to develop a plan to “save” the Indians by dividing their lands into homesteads. Fletcher and others felt that allotment would mainstream Indians into white society.

In 1887, Congress passed the **Dawes Severalty Act** authored by Senator Dawes. Until then, Indian lands were owned by the tribe as a whole, rather than by individual members of the nation. The Dawes Act dissolved tribal ownership, primarily in western Oklahoma, and gave specific amounts of land to each individual Indian. It also extended the protection of U.S. laws over the Indians.



Initially, the act did not extend to lands occupied by the Five Tribes; the Osage, Miami, Peoria, and Sac and Fox lands in the Indian Territory; the Seneca Nation of New York; and land adjoining the Sioux Nation of Nebraska. An amendment in 1890 extended the act to include the Sac and Fox, and in 1893 Congress extended the act to the other tribes.

### Allotments and the Five Tribes

The Dawes Commission turned its attention to negotiating the exchange of tribal lands held in commonality by the Five Tribes for allotments in severalty (lands held by one individual). In 1895, Congress ordered a survey of Indian Territory. The Dawes Commission was also directed in 1895 to make a tribal roll and to begin making land assignments without tribal approval.

All of the tribes protested allotment, but in 1897 the Choctaw and Chickasaw were the first to sign allotment agreements. In what is called the Atoka Agreement, each member of the two tribes received about 320 acres of land, and each freedman received 40 acres. The Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole also signed agreements in 1897 in which each Creek member and freedman received about 160 acres, and each Seminole was allotted 120 acres.

Intended to force allotment and compliance, the 1898 **Curtis Act** was a blow against tribal rights. According to the legislation, tribal lands could be divided and Indian governments could be abolished unless they agreed to land allotments. The act abolished tribal courts and made everyone in Indian Territory subject to federal law and the

**A Creek delegation meeting with the Dawes Commission at Muskogee. The Commission never tried to hide its real goals: to dissolve tribal governments and divide Indian land.**

### Something Extra!

Alice Fletcher was fascinated by Native American culture and lived for a time with the Omaha tribe. She was a founding member of the American Anthropological Association.



**Above, right:** Chitto Harjo, also known as Crazy Snake, led a group of Creek who formed a separate government in defiance of the Dawes Commission. **Above:** Some of his followers, known as “Snakes,” are seen in the jail at Fort Gibson in 1901.



laws of Arkansas. The allotment agreements abolished all tribal governments by 1906.

Congress continued taking away tribal rights with a 1901 act that authorized that tribal rolls be closed. The act also required presidential approval of any legislation passed by the Cherokee and Creek tribes. All Indians who had been allotted land were made citizens of the United States. However, the “new citizens” were a small minority in the lands they received, which were to remain in their possession forever, “as long as the grass grows.”

Although the Creek tribe had signed an allotment agreement, a group led by Chitto Harjo (also known as Crazy Snake) resisted the action. In 1901, Harjo’s group formed its own government, and in some cases arrested and whipped Creek who accepted allotments. The Crazy Snake Rebellion ended when federal authorities arrested several members of the group. They finally accepted allotment, rather than go to prison.

By 1902, the Cherokee tribe had also agreed to allotment, but a secret society called the Keetoowah refused to recognize the agreement. The Keetoowah planned to continue to hold their lands in common. Under the threat of federal marshals, however, they consented to allotment. Each Cherokee and freedman was assigned about 110 acres.

## Boomers

Pressure had been mounting to open to white settlers a tract of land in the heart of Indian Territory called the “Unassigned Lands.” The two million acres had been taken for other Indian tribes from the Creek and the Seminole in the 1866 treaties, but no other tribes had been relocated there. The Unassigned Lands included most of present-day Payne, Logan, Kingfisher, Canadian, Oklahoma, and Cleveland counties.

Mixed-blood Elias C. Boudinot, son of the Cherokee leader of the same name, felt that progress and the Indians’ economy would be best served by opening the Unassigned Lands. Boudinot openly promoted the unoccupied lands for settlement, and in 1879 he wrote an article for the *Chicago Times*, which described the Unassigned Lands that he believed were in the public domain.

The idea of white settlement in the “Oklahoma Lands” was also promoted by Dr. Morrison Munford in the *Kansas City Times*. Munford was the first to use the term **boomer** to describe the settlement movement. (Boomers were those who took part in the land “booms” of the late 1800s when western land was opened to settlement.) The settlement movement didn’t need much encouragement. Two men, James Madison Bell, a Cherokee, and Captain Sears made attempts in 1879 to settle in the area, but soldiers made them leave each time.

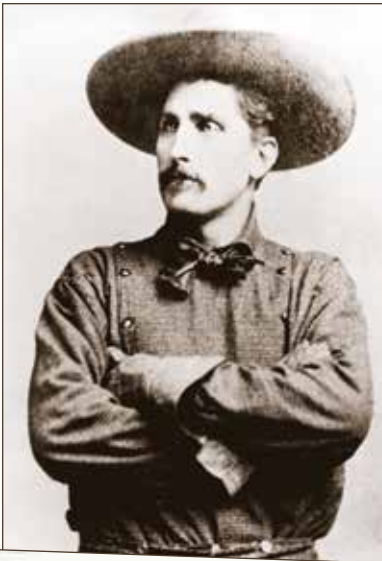
Colonel Charles C. Carpenter, fresh off a similar settlement of non-public land in South Dakota, put together a group of homesteaders in Kansas in 1879. They hoped to establish a settlement on the North



**Above: Elias C. Boudinot. Below: Boomers set up camps in the Cherokee Outlet in preparation for the opening of the land run.**







Canadian River in Indian Territory, but they were soon turned back by U.S. troops. The threat of arrest discouraged Carpenter from further settlement attempts. President Rutherford Hayes also warned settlers to stay out of Indian Territory, but that too had little effect.

David L. Payne, a Kansas pioneer settler and politician, continued the wave of settlement attempts in the Territory in 1880. Eluding patrolling soldiers, Payne led a group of twenty-one men across the border on a six-day ride to the bank of the North Canadian River in the Unassigned Lands, at present-day Oklahoma City. Soon after arriving on May 2, Payne sent word to the Wichita newspapers that the settlers had been successful. The group built a stockade and marked off a capital city. Lieutenant George H. G. Gale and the 4th Cavalry from Fort Reno soon broke up the new settlement. Payne and the settlers were escorted back to Kansas.

Not intimidated, Payne led an even larger group back to the same settlement site in July 1880. Troops soon arrested the invaders. Those who were first offenders were escorted back to Kansas, but Payne had to go before Judge Parker at the Fort Smith federal court. The court set Payne free. He gained even more publicity from the trial and received a hero's welcome in Kansas. He led several other groups of settlers into the Unassigned Lands and traveled to Washington, D.C., several times to lobby for opening the lands. Payne's final effort at settling the lands came in June 1884 at a tent settlement called Rock Falls in the Cherokee Outlet. He quickly set up a printing press and published *The Oklahoma War Chief* newspaper, which, of course, called for opening the lands. Soldiers arrived at the settlement and destroyed the printing press, but not before Payne had gained national attention. Payne died suddenly in November 1884 in Kansas.

William L. Couch, a Payne supporter, immediately took up the cause. In December 1884, Couch led the fifteenth group of intruders of almost four hundred men, women, and children to the site of present-day Stillwater, camping on Boomer Creek. Lieutenant M. H. Day and his buffalo soldier troops from Camp Russell arrived at the camp on December 24. When the settlers refused to leave, Day ordered his troops to use their weapons on the group, but the soldiers refused. Day quickly realized gunfire wasn't the answer, and he withdrew and waited for reinforcements. Colonel Edward L. Hatch arrived on January 11 with seven companies of the Ninth Cavalry, two howitzers, and an infantry company. The troops surrounded the camp and cut off incoming supplies. The boomers held out as long as they could without supplies, but they finally had to surrender and were peacefully escorted back to Kansas.



**Above: This Harper's Weekly front page shows boomers being escorted back to Kansas by the buffalo soldiers.**

## Indian Response

The Indians followed the boomer movement with alarm. All non-Indians were forbidden from being in Indian Territory by federal laws and treaties, but boomers used brazen tactics to get around or overlook the law. Indians tried to battle the movement by sending delegates to Washington, D.C., to remind officials of their obligations to the Native Americans. Tribes near the Unassigned Lands helped agents watch for any illegal movement.

Many tribes in the Territory sent representatives to International Councils, which stressed the need for unified action against the boomer movement. Judge Parker invited Council representatives to help prosecute Payne, and in so doing, they visited boomer camps. The Indians found the settlers to be impoverished and ill-equipped, and this dampened somewhat the Native Americans' threats of armed resistance. Judge Parker ruled in 1881 that the tribes retained an interest in the Unassigned Lands, which strengthened the non-public status of the area. The small victory, though, didn't stop the movement of the homesteaders.

## The Springer Amendment

The legal wrangling over opening the Unassigned Lands continued in the nation's capital. Sensing the inevitable, Pleasant Porter of the Muscogee (Creek) tribe and others offered to give up all claims to the Unassigned Lands for almost \$2.25 million. In spite of criticism from fellow tribal members, the agreement was finalized in the winter of 1889. An amendment written by Indiana Representative William Springer was rushed through Congress on March 2, 1889, to open the Unassigned Lands to settlement. The bill was attached as a **rider** (an addition) to the annual Indian Appropriation Act, which left President

Grover Cleveland little choice but to sign it into law.

In only his third week in office, President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation on March 23, 1889, for settling the Unassigned Lands. Anyone eligible under the Homestead Act would be allowed to enter the area at noon on April 22, 1889, and claim a homestead. Illegal **squatters** were to be escorted from the area. (A squatter is one who settles on unoccupied land in order to gain title to it.) Despite hundreds of patrolling troops, several **sooners** did slip by and stake out choice claims. (A sooner was a person who crossed the starting line of a land run before the appointed time.)



**Opposite page, above: David L. Payne, a pioneer guide, led a number of wagon trains of white settlers into Indian lands illegally. He also promoted the cause of the boomers in his newspaper *The Oklahoma War Chief*. Above: William L. Couch continued Payne's cause after Payne's death.**

## Something Extra!

Since President Benjamin Harrison issued the proclamation for opening the Unassigned Lands by land run, the event was sometimes called "Harrison's Hoss Race."



**Top:** Huge crowds gathered for the election of the first mayor of Guthrie. **Above:** President Benjamin Harrison.

## The First Land Opening

*"President Harrison Issues His Proclamation Opening Up the Coveted Acres"* (The Decatur Republican, Illinois) *"Hurrah For Oklahoma—Pioneers By Thousands on the March"* (New York Times) *"Will Invade Oklahoma—Cities of Southwestern Kansas Gone Crazy Over the Boom"* (Chicago Daily Tribune)

Word spread quickly throughout the country of the proposed land opening in the Indian Territory. The land opening offered hope for those seeking a new life and adventure for those who enjoyed a good thrill. The lure of free land brought young and old, poor and rich, men and women, white and black to the "promised land." People began arriving in Kansas, Texas, and Arkansas days ahead of time. Some came in colonies or with their families; some came alone. They gathered on the south side of the lands at Purcell, on the north side in Kansas and in the Cherokee Outlet, and on the west near Fort Reno and King Fisher Stage Station. (King David Fisher's station site is within the city limits of present-day Kingfisher, first called Lisbon.)

A *New York Times* reporter on the Santa Fe train heading south out of Kansas observed,

*There was a steady movement all night, and then it happened that when the 10 o'clock train on the Santa Fe had crossed the Arkansas and mounted the divide the passengers were treated to the sight of a seemingly endless proces-*



sion of white-capped wagons moving rapidly along the trail which parallels the railroad to Guthrie and beyond.

As far as the eye could reach, looking north and south, the level, green plain was dotted with wagons, horses, and men. There were a dozen Otoe Indians on the train en route to their reservation, and they looked with anything but kindly eyes on the panorama. . . .

The train which took its leisurely flight southward through the Indian Territory to-day was composed of five coaches, each comfortably filled with boomers who had apparently reached the conclusion that their chances of securing quarter sections in the promised land would be greatly improved if they went to Purcell and entered the army of Texans now camped there on the banks of the Canadian. . . .

### **The Run for the Unassigned Lands**

People who had been able to sleep the night before were up early on April 22. The ghostly forms of prairie schooners could be seen moving toward the ford on the river. When the ford became jammed with wagons, some began trying to cross the river at any point, although quicksand hampered that effort. Horses were saddled and bridled; bit and girth were checked again and again. "No cavalryman going on inspection ever paid such minute attention to details as did these home seekers." Trains packed with people rolled across the prairie. Wagons and horses were joined by buggies, surreys, bicycles, mules, and even people on foot. Time inched forward slowly.



**Frank Greer brought a printing press and set type for the first edition of Guthrie's first newspaper.**

The reporter continued:

*At 11:40 o'clock the conductor of the long special train on the siding gave the signal. The engines whistled shrilly and the special began its trip Oklahomaward. It seemed as if every man on the train shouted when the train moved, and a moment later the sound of pistol shots told that the Texans were firing their salute. . . .*

*The succeeding twenty minutes were the longest of the day to those on the banks of the river. . . . Suddenly (Lieutenant Adair) is seen to motion to the soldier near him, and the next moment the cheerful strains of the recall are sounded. In an instant the scene changes. There is a mighty shout, and the advance guard of the invading army is racing like mad across the sands to-*

*ward the narrow expanse of water. The north and south wings seem to strike the water together. In they go, helter-skelter, every rider intent on reaching the bank first. There goes a horse into a deep hole and his rider falls headlong out of the saddle. . . . The racers take different directions. . . . The glass (spyglass) detects dozens of men miles beyond the river. These are boomers who have been hiding.*

Within a few hours, all of the two million acres of the Unassigned Lands were claimed. Estimates of the number of people who made the run varied from 50,000 to 100,000.

### Claiming Land

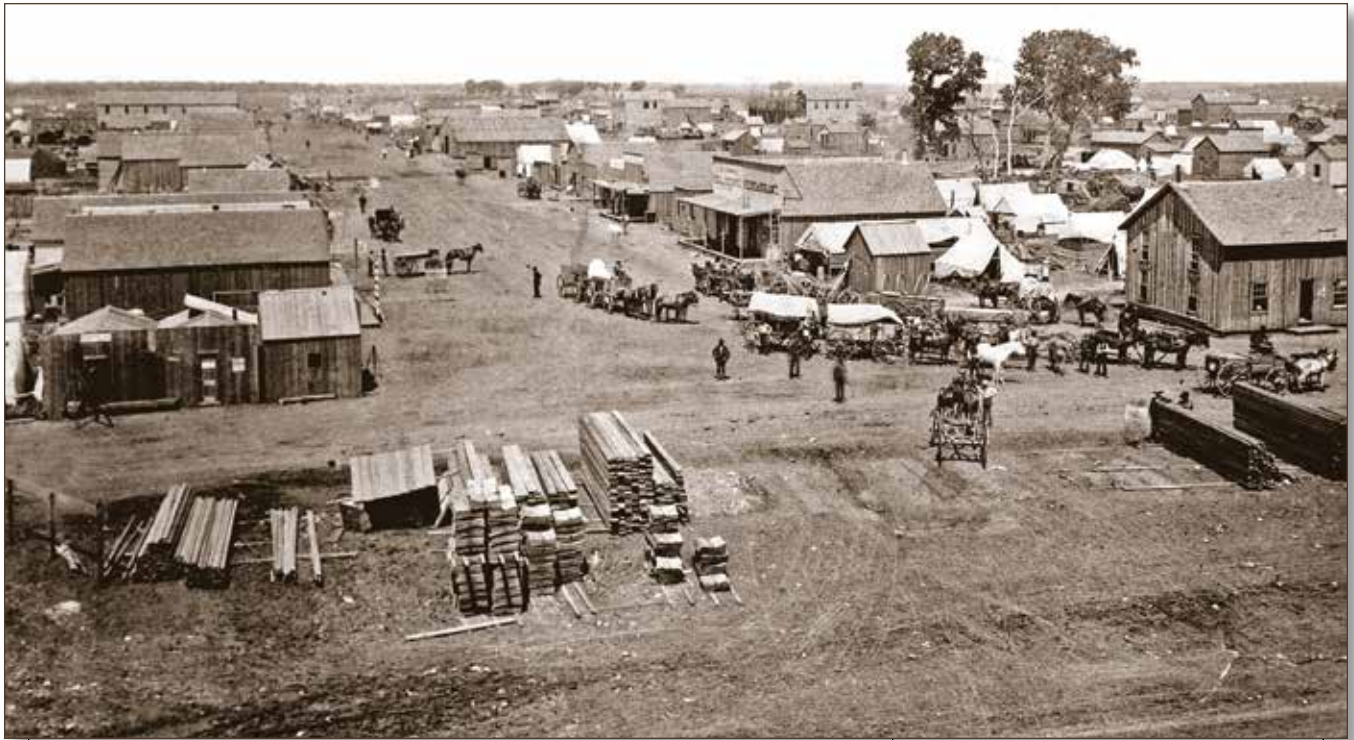
Surveyors had previously left an inscribed cornerstone on each quarter section of land. People claiming land had to first find the stone to get the land description, which then had to be filed at a federal land office at Guthrie or King Fisher station. Homesteaders had to pay a small filing fee and live on the land five years before they could obtain actual title to the property. There were often disputes over who filed first for a particular section of land. Some cases were settled in court, while others were settled with fists or guns. Although many people “won” their race for land, there was also a large number who did not. Some who weren’t successful in the land run left disappointed, but others simply turned their focus to helping settle one of several new towns that instantly sprang up.

### New Towns

The Seminole Townsite and Improvement Company was allowed to enter the Territory early to survey town sites at several stations. Other



**The first Oklahoma City post office, photographed on April 22, 1889, the day of the first great Oklahoma land run.**



companies also surveyed town sites; at times the surveys overlapped, causing confusion. The mass of people caused towns of tents to instantly be established at Guthrie, Edmond, Oklahoma Station, Verbeck (Moore), Norman, Stillwater, and Lisbon (Kingfisher).

Oklahoma City was estimated to have a population of 12,000 on its first day of existence. By April 23, Guthrie was a city of 10,000 people, and it had 15,000 people three months later. Even though the towns' beginnings were chaotic, most quickly began to organize local governments. Guthrie's election of a mayor was held on April 23. With no time to print ballots, voters lined up and each man's vote was tallied. The system was sometimes compromised when, after voting, a few people ran to the back of the line and voted again.

A tent and a shingle (sign) were all that was needed to set up shop in the new towns. Lawyers filed claims for clients. Three men with only a few pennies to their name opened the Bank of Guthrie with a potbellied stove for a vault. Frank Greer arrived in Guthrie with a printing press and immediately began setting type for the first edition of the town's first newspaper. Blacksmiths and barbers also served as dentists.

The overwhelming number of people soon caused a shortage of food and water in Guthrie. A *Harper's Weekly* reporter wrote, "Dusty ham sandwiches sold . . . as high as twenty-five cents each, while in the restaurants a plate of pork and beans was valued at seventy-five cents." Dust and heat intensified the burning thirst. Until water wells could be drilled, the only sources of water for the Guthrie area were the Cimarron River and Cottonwood Creek.

At the Oklahoma (City) Station, as in Guthrie, many of the best town lots were illegally claimed ahead of time by deputy marshals

**This photograph shows how Oklahoma City looked on May 2, 1889, when it was only two weeks old.**

## Something Extra!

When the citizens of Guthrie elected Colonel D. B. Dyer as mayor in 1889, he took office in a circus tent labeled "City Hall."



and railroad officials. The Reverend James Murray and a Mr. Kincaid, of the Oklahoma Colony of boomers from Kansas, may have been the first legal claimants.

Nearly a thousand blacks made the 1889 land run, and many others came to the Territory later. Edward McCabe, an African American who had served as state auditor in Kansas, purchased 160 acres about 11 miles east of Guthrie. McCabe established the town of Langston at the site in 1890. He soon published a newspaper, the *Langston Herald*, to promote the town to black settlers. McCabe's plan for an all-black state didn't materialize, but his publicity caught the attention of many. A large number of African Americans soon moved to the Territory. Eventually some fifty black communities were established in Oklahoma, more than in any other state.

## Homesteading

Homesteading a claim meant much more than building a shelter, although that was an important step. The geography of the area de-



termined in large part the type of shelter a family built and the type of crops they grew. West of the Cross Timbers area, trees grew primarily along rivers and creeks. Shipping in lumber was far too costly. So early settlers used their wagons or a tent until they could build a dugout or "soddie." Depending on when their claim was settled, a family's house had to wait until the land could be broken up for plowing and a crop planted. Often a barn was built before the house.

Settlers built dugouts into the sides of hills or ravine banks and covered them with cottonwood poles or straw or whatever materials they could find for a roof. Often, they left a small opening beside the door for a window.

Sometimes a house was built from the soil, which contained the densely packed roots of the prairie grass. These sod houses were made from sod bricks that were either dug with a spade or with a special plow that cut a strip 12 inches wide by 4 inches thick. The sod slabs were then stacked on top of each other to make a one-room house. Hanging blankets divided the room if needed, and windows could be added. Floors were usually dirt. Roofs were made of cedar, cottonwood, willow, or brush, topped with more prairie grass and sod. If clay was available, it was used to chink any cracks. Sod houses were naturally insulated and provided a safe haven from prairie wildfires. Heavy rains, however, caused mud and water to leak into the house.

**Top:** This portrait of Edward McCabe hangs in the State Capitol. **Above:** Albert Maywood at his first home (a dugout) in Oklahoma City.



Snakes, spiders, insects, and mice were part of daily life in a soddie. A canopy was often placed over the cook stove to prevent things from falling into the food!

If the family's farm was successful, in a few years they built a wood frame house with wood floors. Usually the houses were small to begin with, but additions were made when the family had the means to do so. Cellars, or "fraidy holes," provided protection from severe storms and tornadoes, as well as cool places to store canned fruits and vegetables. Windmills pumped water from the ground for the family and the livestock. A cistern held rainwater when underground water couldn't be found.

A vegetable garden helped feed the family. Bread was often made from a sourdough "starter," which took the place of dry yeast, and most settlers carefully brought their "starter" with them. Many settlers also brought along a favorite rose or other hardy plant.

**Sod houses like the one in this painting by Wayne Cooper were common in western Oklahoma after the land run.**

## It's Your Turn

1. What was the purpose of the Dawes Severalty Act?
2. Where were the Unassigned Lands?
3. Who were the sooners?
4. How did people acquire land in the land run for the Unassigned Lands?



## Section 2

# Oklahoma Territory

### Something Extra!

The first seven counties in Oklahoma Territory (called County One, County Two, etc.) were later named Canadian, Cleveland, Kingfisher, Logan, Oklahoma, Payne, and Beaver.



**A Cherokee “Stripper!”**  
Early cattle ranchers in Indian Territory referred to the whole Cherokee Outlet as the Cherokee Strip.

### As you read, look for

- the establishment of the Territory of Oklahoma,
- the allotment of Indian lands and the land openings, and
- vocabulary terms **Organic Act**, **township**, and **normal school**.

**For almost a year after the 1889 land run for the Unassigned Lands**, there was no organized government in the Territory. In May 1889, citizens from Guthrie and communities to the north held a convention to discuss forming a provisional (temporary) government. Citizens from communities south and west of Guthrie protested the plan, and a meeting of mayors was held at Frisco, west of Oklahoma City, on July 15, 1889. The majority of people at the Frisco convention wanted to wait for Congress to form a territorial government. A committee chaired by Sidney Clarke lobbied Congress to establish a territorial government. When the 51st Congress met in December 1889, President Harrison presented the need for a government in the Territory.

### The Organic Act

On May 2, 1890, Congress finally passed the **Organic Act** for the Territory of Oklahoma. The first section of the act specified that Oklahoma Territory included all of the land west of the Five Tribes, including No Man’s Land. Surplus Indian reservation lands would become part of Oklahoma Territory as they were opened to homesteaders. The president would appoint a governor, secretary, and three supreme court judges. Citizens would elect a 13-member council and a 26-member house of representatives. The legislature would meet for no more than 60 days every two years, except for the first session, which could be 120 days long.

The act established seven counties, known by numbers. County seats were Guthrie, Oklahoma City, Norman, El Reno, Kingfisher, Stillwater, and Beaver City in the Panhandle. Citizens voted on county names. Until an Oklahoma code of laws could be adopted, the Territory would operate under the laws of Nebraska.



Section 15 of the act stated, “the legislative assembly . . . shall hold its first session at Guthrie in said territory . . . ; and at said first session, or as soon thereafter . . . , the Governor and legislative assembly shall proceed to locate and establish a seat of government.”

### Greer County

The Organic Act also initiated action to determine ownership of the land between the Red River and its north fork, territory claimed by Texas as Greer County. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the South or Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River was the main branch and, therefore, the Greer County area was part of Oklahoma Territory. Homesteaders were allowed to keep their land, and the Choctaw tribe was compensated for an original claim to the land. The area was eventually divided into four counties—Beckham, Jackson, Greer, and Harmon.

### No Man’s Land

No Man’s Land (the Oklahoma Panhandle) had been somewhat of a land island since the establishment of the borders of Kansas and Texas. There had also been some confusion over whether the strip of land was part of the Cherokee Outlet. Ranchers and squatters were drawn to the area identified on maps as the “Public Land Strip.” The first post office was established at Tarbox Ranch in 1880. When the second post office was set up at Beaver City in 1883, mail was addressed to the Neutral Strip of Indian Territory.

Communities began to form in the 1880s, and from 1885 to 1890, residents of the Strip tried to gain territorial status as the Cimarron Territory. The Strip gained homestead rights when it was officially made

## Map 34 Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory

**Map Skill:** What area of Oklahoma Territory lay directly west of the Chickasaw Nation?



**Top:** Washington officials handed out Oklahoma territorial offices as political favors, which angered Oklahomans. George Steele of Indiana was appointed governor. **Above:** Warren Lurty of Virginia served as U.S. marshal. **Right:** One of the few Oklahomans appointed to a position in Oklahoma Territory was Horace Speed of Guthrie (seated left, with Warren Lurty), who served as U.S. district attorney.

part of Oklahoma Territory in 1890. The entire Strip was referred to as Beaver County, until statehood divided the area into three counties—Beaver, Texas, and Cimarron.

### First Territorial Government

President Harrison overlooked the people in Oklahoma when he appointed George W. Steele of Indiana as the territorial governor. Many people in the Territory felt the president was “carpetbagging,” or returning political favors with his appointments. Robert Martin of Harrison (a community of ex-Union soldiers west of Oklahoma City named for the president) was named territorial secretary. Other appointments were Horace Speed of Guthrie as U.S. district attorney; Warren G. Lurty of Virginia as U.S. marshal (he soon resigned and was succeeded by William Grimes of Kingfisher); and F. B. Green of Illinois, Abraham J. Seay of Missouri, and John G. Clark of Wisconsin as supreme court judges.

Governor Steele arrived in Guthrie on May 23, 1890, and soon traveled throughout the Territory to meet the people. A variety of political groups were represented in the Territory. In addition to the Republican Party and Democratic Party, the Farmers Alliance Party, the Greenback Party, the People’s or Populist Party, and the Socialist Party were represented.

Governor Steele called an election for August 5 to elect the territorial legislature. The new legislature met for the first time on August 27. The first bill introduced in the council was an act to provide for the care and custody of persons convicted under the laws of the Territory. A contract was signed with Kansas to place Oklahoma prisoners in the penitentiary (state prison) at Lansing, Kansas.

The legislature quickly adopted a system of public schools. The Organic Act had appropriated \$50,000 for schools, and reserved Sections



16 and 36 of each township for the use and benefit of public schools. Section 33 of each township was set aside to support public buildings and correctional facilities, and Section 13 was designated to provide support for state educational institutions. (A **township** consists of 36 one-mile-square parcels of land that are called *sections*. Each section contains 640 acres of land.) Governor Steele recommended that four schools be established in each township in Logan, Oklahoma, Canadian, Kingfisher, and Payne counties. The first bill in the house of representatives concerned schools. Much discussion was held on the issue because every legislator wanted laws that resembled those from his home state. Counties were given the option of providing separate schools for white and for African American children or providing mixed schools. The first legislative session provided for establishing a territorial university at Norman, an agricultural and mechanical college at Stillwater, and a **normal school** (teacher training institution) at Edmond.

Much political wrangling took place in the first years on where to locate the territorial capital. Guthrie and Oklahoma City politicians fought tirelessly for the capital, and Kingfisher even entered the competition. On November 10, 1890, Governor Steele vetoed the Kingfisher capital bill, which paved the way to keep the capital in Guthrie.

### The Cherokee (Jerome) Commission

With more homesteaders than available land, the government wanted to encourage the Indians on the western reservations to give up their surplus lands. President Harrison appointed David H. Jerome, Warren G. Sayre, and Alfred M. Wilson to the Cherokee Commission (also called the Jerome Commission) to negotiate with the tribes. In typical fashion, the commission methodically worked out agreements with the Native Americans to allot tribal lands and to purchase surplus lands. By November 1893, the commission had secured eleven agreements with Indian tribes through various means that dissolved the reservations. More than fifteen million acres of land were now available for opening to homesteaders.

### More Land Openings

In 1891, the small reservations of the Sac and Fox, Potawatomi, Iowa, and Shawnee tribes were allotted, with each man, woman, and child receiving 160 acres. The government purchased the surplus 870,000 acres and opened it for settlement at noon on September 22, 1891. An estimated 20,000 people took part in the run for 6,097, 160-acre homesteads. A few days later, government surveyors laid out the towns of Chandler and Tecumseh, which were also opened. Two new counties—Lincoln and Pottawatomie—were created by the opening, and Payne, Cleveland, and Logan counties were expanded.

Initial agreements for the surplus Cheyenne and Arapaho lands were reached in October 1890, but many Indians refused to accept the



**Abraham J. Seay** of Missouri served on the first territorial supreme court with F. B. Green of Illinois and John Clark of Wisconsin. Seay later served as territorial governor.

## Something Extra!

Rapid western settlement led to the “official closing of the frontier” by 1890. The phrase was used by the director of the U.S. Census Bureau when the population density of the country became more than two persons per square mile.



**Above:** The train, loaded with people, awaits the signal for the opening of the Cherokee Outlet on September 16, 1893.

**Right:** More than 100,000 people lined up for the opening of the Cherokee Outlet in 1893.

This photograph was taken as people made their run for land.

**Opposite page, above:** When a crowd gathers, entrepreneurs find a way to make money.

The crowd lined up outside the land office in Enid provides a captive market for the “hawkers” selling food.

allotments until later. President Harrison proclaimed that the surplus 4 million acres of the reservation would be opened by a run on April 19, 1892. About 25,000 people, some with previous land run experience, gathered for the spring race. For the first time, there was more land available than homesteaders, and some left without staking a claim because they did not want the rough western land. Ranchers grazed cattle on the unbroken western lands for several years, but eventually homesteaders staked claims to the land. The 1892 run added the counties of Blaine, Dewey, Roger Mills, Custer, Washita, and Day, although Day County was joined with Ellis County at statehood.

Lands were allotted to the Tonkawa in 1891 and to the Pawnee in 1892. The surplus Tonkawa and Pawnee lands, located on the eastern side of the Cherokee Outlet, were opened along with the Cherokee Outlet lands on September 16, 1893. A stock market crash, drought, and much publicity brought an estimated 100,000 people to the land run for 6 million acres of land. The secretary of the interior had already divided the land into seven counties and designated where the county





# Oklahoma Profiles



## Thompson Benton Ferguson and Elva Shartel Ferguson

**Born in Iowa in 1857 but raised in Kansas, Thompson and Elva Shartel Ferguson**

staked a claim near Oklahoma City in the 1889 land run. Before making the run, Ferguson served as an ordained Methodist minister for a few years and taught school in Kansas. They sold their claim in Oklahoma Territory and returned to Kansas, where Ferguson started a new career in journalism.

In 1892, Thompson and Elva moved to Watonga, where they established the *Watonga Republican* newspaper. He became very involved in the Republican Party and was appointed postmaster of Watonga in 1897. President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him governor of Oklahoma Territory in 1901, a position he held until 1906. Elva continued publishing the newspaper.

After serving as governor, Ferguson returned to Watonga and to the newspaper. Thompson died in 1921. Elva was also very involved in the Republican Party, and she served on various committees and was a member of the Oklahoma delegation to the national convention in 1924. Elva died in 1947, but the Ferguson home built in 1901 still stands in Watonga. Edna Ferber's novel *Cimarron*, published in 1930, was based to some extent on Elva Ferguson's experiences with territorial politics and frontier life.

seats would be located. The names later selected for the new counties were Garfield, Grant, Kay, Noble, Pawnee, Woods, and Woodward. Officials tried to eliminate some of the chaos of the earlier runs by requiring participants to register prior to the land opening. Land-hungry settlers and speculators took aim at the best farmlands and town lots. Eastern land in the Cherokee Outlet was preferred over the rough western terrain.

Negotiations took longer to secure the surplus 183,440 acres of Kickapoo lands in the heart of the Territory. President Grover Cleveland proclaimed that the last and smallest land run in the Territory would be held May 23, 1895. The lands were added to Lincoln, Oklahoma, and Pottawatomie counties.

## Territorial Governors

The turmoil in Oklahoma Territory was reflected in the territorial government. Governor Steele resigned and returned to Indiana in October 1891. Robert Martin, secretary of the Territory, was acting governor until February 1892 when Abraham Seay, an associate judge of the territorial supreme court, became governor. After serving a year, he was replaced by William Renfrow, the only Democratic territorial governor. Renfrow, from Norman, served from 1893 to 1897. Two territorial schools were established during Renfrow's administration. Classes began at the Northwestern Normal School at Alva in 1897, and the Colored Agricultural and Normal University was founded the same year at Langston.

Cassius M. Barnes was governor from 1897 to 1901. He also saw two universities established—the University Preparatory School in Tonkawa and the Southwestern Normal School in Weatherford.

William M. Jenkins served as territorial governor from May to November 1901. Criticism about how he handled matters at a private sanatorium in Norman and the death of President William McKinley led to his removal from office by President Theodore Roosevelt. William C. Grimes, former U.S. marshal and secretary of the Territory, was named acting governor for a month, until Thompson B. Ferguson was appointed governor in December 1901. Originally from Iowa, Ferguson had established a newspaper in Watonga. Ferguson held the office of governor until January 1906. The last territorial governor was Frank Frantz. Frantz, a former postmaster and Osage Indian agent, led the Territory into statehood.

### The Last Land Distributions

The Wichita and Caddo tribes agreed to allotment in June 1891. The allotment and sale of surplus Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache tribal lands was signed in October 1892. The three tribes kept about 500,000 acres of grazing lands, called the Big Pasture, for their common use. The Fort Sill military range and the newly created Wichita Mountains National Forest Preserve were also set aside. President McKinley set the opening for these lands on August 6, 1901.

To improve the land opening method, the 3.5 million acres were distributed by a lottery. Homesteaders registered at land offices in Lawton or El Reno in July. About 87,000 people registered in the Lawton office, and 78,000 signed up at El Reno for the 13,000 available quarter sections of land. Beginning on August 6, each land office randomly drew 125 registration cards each day, with each card numbered consecutively as it was drawn. Each person could then select his or her claim in turn. Counties already created from the lands were Caddo, Comanche, and Kiowa. Some of the new territory was added to Roger Mills, Washita, and Canadian counties. County seats were designated at Lawton, Anadarko, and Hobart. Town lots were sold in the county seats.

Other Indian reservation lands were allotted, but there were no surplus lands available for homesteaders. All of the land was divided equally among the tribal members. Land was allotted to members of the Ponca and Otoe-Missouria tribes in 1904 and to the Kaw (Kansas)

## Something Extra!

In 1894, Geronimo and other Chiricahua Apache were sent to live in villages at Fort Sill. Geronimo died in 1909 and is buried on the Chief's Knoll at the post's cemetery.



In 1901, the reserve lands of the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation were opened for settlement. This picture of the lottery for this land was taken at El Reno.





## Map 35 Land Openings

**Map Skill:** How was the land in the Cherokee Outlet opened?

## Something Extra!

In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt hunted wolves in the Big Pasture area that became part of Tillman County. He was taken on the hunt by U.S. Marshal John R. Abernathy, whose young sons traveled by horseback to visit the president in Washington in 1910.

and Osage Indians in 1906. Although their land was allotted, the Osage tribe retained the mineral rights to the land.

A different method was used when it came time to distribute the lands of the Big Pasture. The land was sold in 160-acre tracts to the highest bidders in December 1906. The \$5 million received from the sale was added to funds set aside for the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache tribes.

The transfer of the Indian lands had come swiftly. At an equally fast rate, homesteaders arrived, and new towns and a territorial government were built. Perhaps “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” but much of Oklahoma Territory began taking shape in a day.

On the heels of the first land run, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on April 24, 1889, “The real significance of this remarkable invasion of Oklahoma lies not so much in the eagerness of the boomers to get new and free land as it does in its being the first step towards the complete opening of the Indian Territory to white civilization, and towards the formation of a new state, which will be knocking at the door of the Union before we are aware of it. . . . It is only the beginning of a movement which will ultimately and before long absorb the whole of Indian Territory in the new State of Oklahoma. . . .”

## It’s Your Turn

1. Who appointed the territorial governors?
2. Who was the first territorial governor?
3. What was the last area in Oklahoma Territory opened to settlement?

# Oklahoma Profiles



## Mattie Beal



**Mattie Beal was one of thousands of women who participated in the Oklahoma Territory land openings.** The 23-year-old telephone operator (known as a “Hello Girl”) from Wichita, Kansas, and her friend Florence Allen joined the thousands of people in El Reno in 1901 who were registering for the land lottery. Mattie and Florence made their way with a soldier escort through the throng of people to register. They believed they had little chance of winning, so they returned to Kansas. Mattie soon learned that her number was the second one drawn. Mattie traveled by train to Marlow, the nearest railroad depot, and then by wagon to Lawton. Mattie chose land south of the town site of Lawton.

The young Mattie’s heart was won by Charles Payne, a New Yorker who built a lumber business in Lawton. They married in 1902. Lawton grew quickly, and city officials persuaded Mattie and Charles to

**Above:** The Lawton Heritage Association purchased the Payne home in 1974. In 1975, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. **Above, right:** Mattie became famous after receiving her allotment, and she received hundreds of marriage proposals. She chose Charles Payne.

divide some of their land into town lots. After reserving some of the land for the family, a school, a church, and a park, they auctioned off the other land in 1902.

The Paynes built a neoclassic Greek home at a cost of \$30,000, which became a social hub in Lawton. The Paynes raised three daughters in the home. The Lawton Heritage Association purchased the home several years later and restored it to the early 1900s time period.

# Chapter Review

## Chapter Summary

- In 1870, the federal government began to change its policy toward Native Americans from removal, treaties, and reservations to the breaking up of Indian nations.
- The Dawes Severalty Act of 1877 dissolved tribal ownership of land and gave specific amounts of land to each individual Indian. In 1893, the Dawes Severalty Act was extended to the Five Tribes.
- The 1898 Curtis Act threatened to destroy tribal governments if the Indians refused to accept allotments.
- Pressure mounted to open a tract of land in the heart of Indian Territory called the Unassigned Lands. Those who pushed for the opening of the land to white settlement were called *boomers*. The U.S. Cavalry stopped several attempts at illegal settlement on the Unassigned Lands.
- The Springer Amendment called for the opening of the Unassigned Lands to settlement. President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation declaring that the land would be opened to settlement by a “run” on April 22, 1889. Settlers who slipped by the troops and staked out choice claims early were referred to as *sooners*.
- All of the Unassigned Lands were claimed within a few hours, and several towns were instantly established.
- Nearly a thousand blacks made the 1889 land run, and several all-black communities were established.
- The Organic Act of 1890 helped to establish the guidelines for the Territory of Oklahoma.
- The president appointed the territorial governors, beginning with George W. Steele. Frank Frantz was the last territorial governor.
- The territorial legislature provided for a system of public schools and colleges.

- Additional land openings of surplus Indian lands were done by lottery and auction.

## Vocabulary

Write the following words on a sheet of paper with the definition that matches it. Do not just use the letters of the definitions; write them out completely.

1. auction
  2. boomer
  3. cornerstone
  4. lottery
  5. penitentiary
  6. provisional government
  7. sooner
  8. squatter
  9. territorial government
- 
- A. A contest whose winner is chosen by a drawing
  - B. A person who crossed the starting line of a land run before the appointed time
  - C. The public sale of something to the highest bidder
  - D. One who took part in the land runs of the late 1800s, when western land was opened to settlers
  - E. A correctional institution for those convicted of major crimes
  - F. A form of government used by citizens just prior to statehood
  - G. A temporary form of government
  - H. One who settles on unoccupied land in order to gain the title to it
  - I. A specific marker to determine the boundary of a certain area

## Understanding the Facts

1. What was the name of the legislation that called for the dissolving of tribal ownership of land?
2. What was the purpose of the Curtis Act?

3. Who published an article in the *Chicago Times* describing the Unassigned Lands as public domain?
4. What U.S. congressman called for the opening of the Unassigned Lands through an amendment he authored?
5. What area did the first land run open to settlement?
6. Name at least five towns that were established during the land run of 1889.
7. Who founded the town of Langston and hoped to establish an all-black state?

### Developing Critical Thinking

1. Discuss the significance of April 22, 1889.
2. Explain in detail the dispute with Texas over Greer County and how it became part of Oklahoma.
3. Territorial Governor Thompson Ferguson remarked, "I believe an appointed or elected official should never use his public office to enhance his private fortune." Do you agree? Why or why not? Has there been any recent case in the news of corruption in government office? If so, describe the facts of the case.

### Applying Your Skills

Create a class newspaper dated April 30, 1889. Include the following:

- a. Feature articles about: (1) The events of the day of the 1889 land run, (2) Settlement of one of the towns, and (3) Problems with land claims.
- b. Three advertisements that would be appropriate for the time period.
- c. At least one first-person account of the experience of claiming a town lot or farm lot.
- d. Two want-ads for jobs.

### Exploring Technology

Research the Dawes Severalty Act using several Internet websites in order to get some different viewpoints. Write a report on how the Act destroyed the tribal ownership of land and the Indian way of life. Include a description of how the tribal lands were to be allotted to each individual tribal member. Explain the ways many Indians were cheated out of their land at this time.

## Building Skills

## Recognizing Propaganda

**Propaganda refers to ideas, facts, or rumors spread** to help a cause or to hurt an opposing cause. It can be used to sway public opinion or to persuade people to make certain decisions. What we forget is that these same techniques are used in advertising.

**Bandwagon approach.** You have probably used this technique on your parents to try to convince them to let you do something or go somewhere because "everybody else is." You hope your parents will think it is all right since other parents are allowing their sons and daughters to go.

**Testimonial.** With this technique, a well-known person such as an athlete or a movie star describes how wonderful a particular product or brand (of motor oil, athletic shoes, sport drink, and so on) is. This technique is also used when movie stars campaign for political candidates. When an influential person is shown with another person or thing, it is an attempt to *transfer* honor and respect from one individual

to another. Has this technique ever influenced your decision about buying a product?

**Repetition.** If you watch television one evening, you will see that many short commercials are repeated several times during a particular show. Advertisers use repetition to drive home a particular message. They are hoping that if you see the message often enough, you will remember it.

**Cause-effect relationship.** A misleading cause-effect relationship is often used to persuade. "Twenty students in the class who used computer X to write their Oklahoma history reports got an A." The implication here is that those twenty students only got an A because they used computer X. Would this persuade you to go buy computer X? Why or why not?

**Write an ad** for a newspaper or television station for a product or a political candidate using one or more of the above techniques.