RESOURCE PROTECTION PLANNING PROJECT

TRANSPORTATION IN OKLAHOMA TO 1920

REGION TWO

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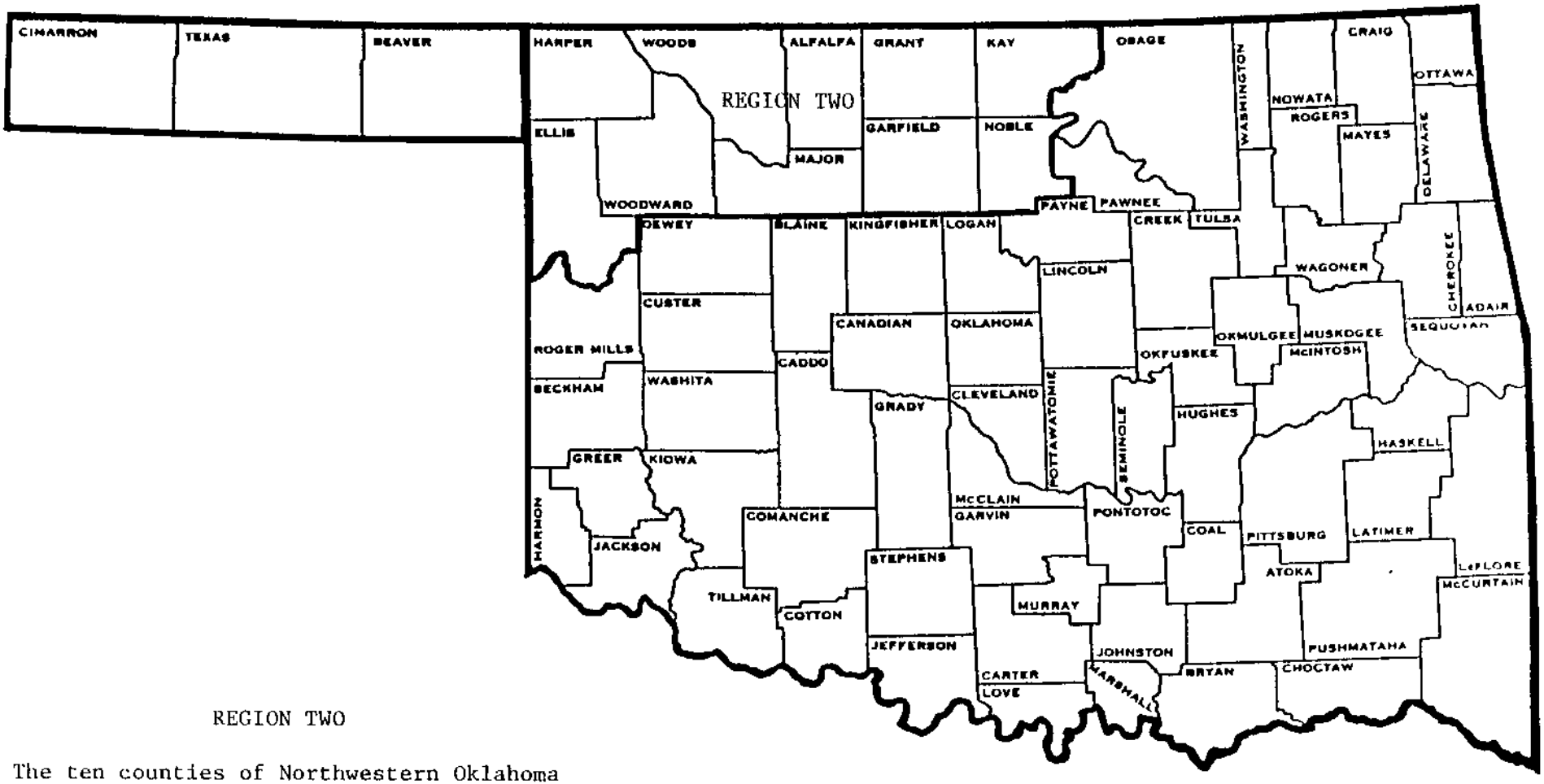
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TRANSPORTATION IN OKLAHOMA

Transportation has played a key role in the economic and social development of Oklahoma. Early on, a rudimentary transportation network had a great influence on the level of commercial activities by allowing an exchange of goods and information within the region and by providing a connection to markets in the South. Transportation also influenced the settlement of the region by both Indians and whites. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, improved mobility of goods, services, and people had far reaching social consequences. With faster links to the nation's cultural and political centers, the frontier disappeared and Oklahoma became fully integrated into the union. For purposes of this historic context, transportation in Oklahoma encompasses those facilities built to facilitate the movement of goods, services, and people. This includes sites and structures associated with river transportation, early roads and cattle trails, railways, and the state's highway system. This study covers the period from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when traders first used rivers in eastern Oklahoma, to the mid-1920s, when various levels of government began to fund construction of a modern highway system.

The development of transportation in Oklahoma occurred in distinct phases. The first took place prior to the introduction of railways and the second period began when railroads entered the territory in the 1870s. Before the



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The ten counties of Northwestern Oklahoma

coming of the railroad, existing modes of transportation limited economic development. The movement of bulky items was restricted to waterways in eastern Oklahoma and to draft animals in overland travel. Each of these forms of transportation was slow and commercially unreliable. With the advent of railways in Oklahoma, large amounts of freight could be conveyed across the region faster and without regard for the depth of rivers or the needs of dray animals. The railroad revolutionized transportation in Oklahoma and had an unprecedented effect on the region by bringing in thousands of white settlers, contributing to the destruction of Indian sovereignty, and stimulating tremendous economic development.

One of the first examples of transportation's significance to trade in Oklahoma were waterways, and one of the earliest examples of these routes is the Three Forks region at the confluence of the Arkansas, Grand, and Verdigris Rivers. This site, active before 1820, was an important trading area with access to the Gulf of Mexico. Then, keelboats were the main means of river transportation, moving the region's products, mostly pelts, to New Orleans. These waterways also facilitated settlement, for Indian settlers used keelboats to reach Indian Territory over the same rivers as the traders who sent the region's products down river.

A later innovation in transportation permitted a greater volume of goods to move to and from Oklahoma. This involved the use of steam power, which also had an effect on the

region's agriculture. After removal to Indian Territory, some Indians, mostly intermarried whites and mixed-bloods, raised cash crops. Cotton, the main export crop, required a form of transportation that could move such a bulky item. Steamboats were the answer, and these craft plied the Mississippi and Oklahoma's eastern rivers to pick up these cargoes. The result was a great increase in the volume of goods exchanged, and the extension of the cotton culture to what would become Oklahoma.

While the waterways of eastern Oklahoma remained an important transportation network through the Civil War, overland trails persisted as the major means of moving foods and people. One of the earliest overland routes was the Santa Fe Trail, which passed through Oklahoma's panhandle. Its first regular use was in the early 1820s when Americans used the trail to trade between Saint Louis and the Mexican outpost of Santa Fe. Trade increased in volume and the trail continued to be used until the 1880s, when the railroad entered Santa Fe. Even so, the trail was not a factor in Oklahoma's commercial development; it simply passed through the region.

Beginning in the 1820s, forts linked by military roads formed an important part of the U. S. government's attempts to pacify the Indians living in what is now Oklahoma. The first of these roads, built in 1827, connected Fort Smith, Arkansas with Fort Gibson in the Three Forks region. Other

such roads traversed the region linking military posts scattered from Camp Supply, just east of the panhandle, to Fort Towson, in the southeastern part of the territory. Although generally of poor quality, these roads served as important overland routes until the coming of the railroads.

Roads also moved settlers across the region. The Texas Road, running north-south from Missouri to Texas, was among the first of these trails. First used in the 1820s by settlers who sought land in Texas, then a province of Mexico, the road later provided an avenue for Indian settlers travelling north to Indian Territory after their removal from the eastern United States. Later, it became an important route linking Texas, Indian Territory, and Kansas during the period of cattle drives from Texas to Kansas after the Civil War.

In 1849, the discovery of gold in California caused an exodus west. Southerners took the California Road that ran west from Fort Smith, Arkansas, through Indian Territory to the gold fields in California. In order to serve these travellers going to California, trading posts dotted the path. Apart from getting people to California, this well traveled trail helped settle Oklahoma.

One late addition to the forms of transportation available to people in Indian Territory was the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, a stage line that stretched from the Saint Louis to San Fransisco. Though the section of the

stage line crossing southeastern Indian Territory only lasted from 1858 to 1861, it was the first commercial route through the region, and also brought mail into the territory. Though the stage company abandoned the road in 1861, it continued to be maintained and after statehood became part of the state's road system.

Even before the Civil War there were cattle drives north through Oklahoma using the Texas Road. However, after the Civil War a glut of cattle in Texas and high prices for beef in Chicago caused more cattle trails to be blazed north from Texas to Baxter Springs, Missouri as well as Wichita and Dodge City, Kansas, where they would be shipped by rail to Chicago. The earliest of these trails was the Shawnee cattle trail. The eastern fork of the Shawnee Trail was the Texas Road, which went through eastern Oklahoma through Baxter Springs to Saint Louis, Missouri while the western fork of this trail turned northwest to reach Wichita. The most famous of these trails was the Chisholm Trail, which ran through central Oklahoma and split into two routes in Kingfisher County to take cattle to either Dodge City or Wichita. The Great Western Trail passed through western Oklahoma en route to Dodge City, once acclaimed the cow capital of the world. This period of great cattle drives only lasted about twenty years, and died out when rail connections pushed through Indian Territory to reach Texas. As a result, the cattle trails passing through Oklahoma lost

much of their traffic, but were still used as roads through Indian Territory and for local drives by the region's cattlemen.

The Reconstruction Treaties of 1866 forced the Five Civilized Tribes to permit railroads to cross Indian lands and in so doing precipitated a transportation revolution in Indian Territory. The most obvious change was an exponential increase in carrying capacity which altered agricultural practices by allowing more residents to raise cash crops. In addition, the railroads created towns such as Vinita, South McAlester, Ardmore, Ada, and Durant to manage their operations, and whites gravitated to these towns in unprecedented numbers. The Indians could not control this growth, which diluted their power and resulted in the destruction of Indian sovereignty. Once the Indians lost their self-government, Oklahoma and Indian Territories united as the state of Oklahoma in 1907.

After 1900, once the allotment of Indian lands was underway, towns like South McAlester could incorporate and achieve independence from Indian governments. This allowed towns to levy taxes and bonds, and in larger towns one of the early investments was for an interurban, also known as a traction company. These enterprises, financed by the towns and built by companies outside of the territory, ran trolleys both within towns and between a larger town and its suburbs. These companies in many ways resembled railroads, but their

significance was of a more local nature. Tractions were the first mass transit facilities in Oklahoma's towns and signified a certain level of urbanization. Connecting a larger town with the smaller townships surrounding it, interurbans were the beginning of commuter life as we know it today. These facilities increased the effective radius of goods, services, and people on a local level and helped to change the social life of towns.

Concomitant with the advent of traction companies in the larger towns was the construction of section roads throughout what is now known as Oklahoma. In this instance, it was settlement that improved transportation and not vice versa. When Indian lands were allotted and Oklahoma Territory surveyed for settlement, blocks of land one mile on a side constituted the main land measurement, a section. Roads followed the section lines and small towns, usually little more than a post office and a general store, sprang up. The location of these small towns was significant, for they had to be spaced close enough to permit a farmer and his wagon to reach the town, conduct business, and get back to his farm in one day.

The state highway system provided the final embellishment to the developing transportation network in Oklahoma. The state highway system began in 1910 with the creation of a state agency to oversee roads in the state. However, by 1915 this office was still not directly responsible for any roads

in the state; it only served to police county activities. After World War I federal money became available for road construction and highway mileage increased dramatically. Such mobility meant that a rural resident had more immediate access to the goods and services in towns, and helped to bring about the end of many small towns whose existence was justified by the limits of animal powered vehicles. This sort of personal mobility also allowed the Okie exodus to take place during the Great Depression. On a national scale, the spread of fast, personal means of transportation would have an unimaginable impact on the social, cultural, and economic milieu of the nation. We are living with its effects today.

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Next to the Panhandle, region two was the last section of Oklahoma to develop a transportation network. A major reason for this was the late opening of the land to white settlement and the general lack of a military presence in the region, save Camp Supply. This land, initially the territory of the Osage tribe, became part of the Cherokee's lands after their removal from the eastern United States to Indian Territory after 1828. However, as part of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory, region two received little use save as a corridor west to the hunting grounds of the high plains. The Cherokees preferred instead to live in the

woodlands of northeastern Oklahoma, which more closely resembled their former homes. Though it was part of the Cherokee Nation, region two, then known as the Cherokee Outlet, was also the hunting ground of Southern plains tribes such as the Cheyenne and Arapaho. These tribes had a reputation for fierceness, and their presence in the region further deterred its development.

In the 1860s three events began the development of a transportation system in region two: the Civil War, the establishment of Camp Supply, and the creation of cattle trails that linked Kansas, Indian Territory, and Texas. In 1866, the reconstruction treaties between the United States and the Five Civilized Tribes who sided with the South during the Civil War included a clause that forced these tribes to permit the passage of railroads through their lands. Another event that resulted from the Civil War were the cattle drives. During the war cattle in Texas had been left untended and as a result had overpopulated. Yet, in the northern United States beef was at a premium. Those who drove their cattle to markets in Kansas could make good profits, so cattlemen blazed trails north from Texas through Indian Territory to reach the railroads in Kansas. Three of these paths, the Chisholm, Great Western, and West Shawnee Cattle Trails, passed through region two. However, hostile Indians frequently preyed on the early drives. In order to subdue these tribes the federal government established Camp

Supply in what is now Woodward County to act as a provisionment center for the western forts in Indian Territory and to guard the herds as they passed north to Kansas.

Such developments required transportation links in order to function. Two advances in the formation of a transportation network in region two, cattle trails and military roads, occurred at much the same time in the late 1860s. Troops stationed at Camp Supply, established in 1868, built roads that linked this post to other forts in Indian Territory, such as Fort Sill and Fort Reno. The quality of these roads was generally poor though, due to the limited skills of the soldiers who built them along with the lack of adequate tools and materials. However, these roads were among the earliest transportation routes in region two. They facilitated the movement of men and material in campaigns against hostile tribes, guarded cattle drives, and later helped to settle the western half of the Cherokee Outlet.

The trails used to drive stock to market also helped to establish a fairly extensive road network that facilitated transportation within the Cherokee Outlet. The western-most of these trails, the Great Western Trail, passed through Ellis, Woodward, and Harper counties on its way to the rail head at Dodge City. The Chisholm Trail, which crossed the central portion of the region, split into two trails south of the outlet to reach either Dodge City or Wichita. The path to Dodge City crossed Garfield, Major, and Woods counties

while the eastern branch headed north through Garfield and Grant counties to Wichita. In the easternmost section of region two the West Shawnee Trail crossed Noble and Kay counties, also destined for Wichita. Wagon roads connected these trails and helped supply the needs of the ranches operating in the region, while roads such as the Dodge City-Fort Supply Road and the Southern Stage Company route between Caldwell, Kansas and Fort Sill brought people and mail into the Cherokee Outlet. The stage needed stops to change teams, which proved to be the origin of a town in region two. Originally the Enid Stage Stand, this stop on the Southern Stage Company route was later the site of one of the major towns in the region, Enid, the county seat of Garfield County.

Apart from their value to the development of transportation in region two, the cattle trails also influenced the formation of a range cattle industry in region two. In the 1870s individual cattle companies had leased portions of the region from the Cherokees for grazing purposes, but by 1880 various ranchers had formed a loose federation, the Cherokee Strip Livestock Association, and leased the outlet from the Cherokees. Cattlemen then fenced the land and created ranches on which to fatten their cattle. The Cherokees, who had little use for the land, were happy to lease the land to the cattlemen on a continued basis, which made the Cherokee Outlet a preserve of the range cattle industry until the

early 1890s.

The greatest change of all came with the railroads which passed through the Cherokee Outlet. Once the precedent of rails in Indian Territory had been set after the Civil War, rail construction increased rapidly throughout Oklahoma. In region two the arrival of the railroads aided in settlement and helped to change the main pursuit in the region from ranching to farming. Though the federal government did not open region two to white settlement until 1893, three rail lines had crossed the territory by 1889. The first was the Santa Fe Railroad line south from Arkansas City, Kansas, into the Unassigned Lands in central Oklahoma. This road was part of the Santa Fe's main line from Kansas City to Fort Worth, and ran through Newkirk, Ponca City, and Perry in region two. This line was important to the settlement of Oklahoma, for it conveyed settlers to the territory's first land run. The Rock Island line, though it was too late to take settlers to the land run in central Oklahoma, passed through the central section of region two in 1889 and handled much of the traffic that resulted from the settlement of the Unassigned Lands. Among the towns in the Cherokee Outlet served by this railroad were Enid, Medford, and Pond Creek. This line, like the Santa Fe line to the Unassigned Lands, became the rail company's principal connection from Kansas City to Fort Worth.

At about the same time as the line to the Unassigned Lands was being laid, the Santa Fe built a second line through the Cherokee Outlet which originated in Kiowa, Kansas and ended in Canadian, Texas. Service in the Cherokee Outlet began in 1887 when the line reached Waynoka. The Oklahoma section of this railroad lay wholly within region two, and passed through Alva, Waynoka, and Woodward. The original purpose of this railroad was to convey Texas cattle to northeastern markets, but with continued construction the line became the Santa Fe's main route to California.

These were the rail lines that helped to bring as many as 100,000 settlers to the Cherokee Outlet for the largest land run in United States history. Prospective homesteaders also entered the outlet in wagons, on horseback, and on foot, but the trains, literally covered with people who wanted to stake a claim in the Cherokee Outlet, brought great masses of settlers into the territory. After these homesteaders staked their plots and registered their claim, most turned to farming the land. Wheat became the predominant cash crop in region two, due largely to the presence of the railroads. These rails connected farmers in the Cherokee Outlet to national markets and in so doing altered the primary agricultural pursuit of the region. Wheat growing in region two increased in response to the existence of a rail network which could transport this bulky commodity, and the amount of land given over to the cattle industry decreased as a result.

Apart from their initial influence on white settlement in region two and the agricultural practices of its residents, railroads also were an element in town development. Those towns that possessed a rail connection frequently built grain elevators and became commercial centers, while many towns that the rails passed by faded from existence. Due to the fact that rail service was so important to the new towns in region two, city governments employed some unusual methods to acquire a rail connection. Also, the railroads themselves were at times unscrupulous in their attempts to gain the most from the new territory.

The stories of Alva and Enid were an example of what a town would do to get a railroad to come to their town. In Alva, the town government could not gather the funds the Santa Fe had requested for rail service through normal channels, so they voted municipal waterworks bonds and diverted funds from these bonds to secure the connection. In Enid, unknown individuals destroyed a railroad bridge to force the Rock Island Railroad to stop at their town instead of the town the railroad had platted some miles north of Enid. In this instance, the Rock Island managers had a greater opportunity to make money through the sale of town lots in the town they had started, North Enid, and refused to stop at Enid even though they were required to do so by law. The sabotaged bridge and a Senate bill mandating that trains stop at county seats convinced the railroad that Enid was a

better location, and it established service there in 1894.

With the twentieth century came a new innovation in transportation, the automobile. The first such vehicle in region two was a 1901 Oldsmobile, owned by J. C. Corkill of Enid. However, in 1901 no state highway system existed for these cars. A system of section roads did exist though, a by-product of the land survey. When surveyors laid out the section lines of the Cherokee Outlet, they also provided for roads that followed section boundaries. Though these roads were not paved, they provided an organized transportation network for the region's rural residents.

With statehood in 1907 came the foundation of a state highway system in the form of a constitutional clause, but the Legislature did not enact this clause until 1911. The new State Highway Department, though in titular control of the state's budding road network, really had little power. County commissioners were directly responsible for road construction and repair, not the state. This situation changed after World War I with the federal aid projects for state highway construction. Nineteen such projects took place in region two. Among the tasks of the federal projects were paving, grading, and new construction of Oklahoma's highways. Towns like Enid, Perry, and Ponca City were able to boast paved highways that ran through their towns thanks to this project, and the whole region benefitted from improved road conditions. The state as a whole also gained

better roads as a result, and the Oklahoma Department of Highways was able to gain a measure of control over the state's roads due its participation in these federally funded projects.

With these final advancements early in the twentieth century, the transportation system of region two resembled conditions of today. Most of the roads were still graded earth, but the amount of paved highways in the state was steadily increasing. A railroad network was firmly established, and was the principal carrier in the region. The era of cattle drives, stage coaches, and Indian raids became history, replaced by conditions much as we know them today. Effective transportation facilitated all aspects of this development, and helped to transform the unpopulated prairie of the Cherokee Outlet into a valued region of rich wheat farms and oil wells.

PROPERTY TYPE ANALYSIS FOR TRANSPORTATION SITES IN REGION TWO

Research completed to date indicates that the following property types would probably still be extant: trails and roads, river crossings, railroad depots and other railroad structures, bridges, and pre-1920 automobile related buildings. The National Register criteria will be the basis for evaluating all identified properties. National Register criteria are as follows:

A: Properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B: Properties that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C: Properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

D: Properties that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

1. Trails and roads: Cattle trails, military roads, and civilian trails in region two are generally distinguished by the ruts they have left on the prairie. Cattle trails such as the Chisholm Trail will be the most obvious, since the cattle herds left a path in the prairie as much as three feet deep and one hundred yards wide. Ruts left by wagons

will best be located where the wagons forded streams, for the wheels left great scars in the banks.

2. River crossings: These sites are likely to be found in conjunction with the roads and trails of region two. A river crossing used by cattle and wagons will appear as a greatly eroded section of streambank on both sides of the stream. If a known trail or road passed through the area this eroded section of the streambanks is most likely a stream crossing for that trail.

3. Railroad depots and other railroad structures: Railroad depots, located along a section of track, were generally built from a single floor plan that was made larger or smaller to accommodate the depot's traffic. An example of a representative depot is the Alva Santa Fe Depot. The floorplan is linear with two waiting rooms, one for blacks and the other for whites. This building is rectangular in shape with a hipped roof supported by outrigger brackets and shingled with clay tile. Exterior walls of the Alva depot are brick, but the most common method of treating exterior walls consisted of brick on the lower half with stucco above, while other structures were clapboard sided. Also, though not the case in the Alva depot, builders frequently employed copper sheeting to decorate the depots. Finally, there was also a freight dock at one end of the depot. Given the number of towns served by railroads in region two and the generally uniform appearance of the depots, further struct-

ures should be located with more careful research.

4. Bridges: Bridges were features of railroads and highways to cross streams and ravines. There are no common features of these bridges due to the fact that their appearance depended on the length of the span, the load it was expected to bear, and the nature of the terrain the bridge was supposed to cross. Early maps will be the best source for locating and dating such structures.

5. Pre-1920 automobile-related buildings: Prior to the 1920s, crude roads spanned region two. Previous research has not found any early-day garages, stations, or lodging facilities. Owners' tastes generally determined the design of such structures, which makes a generalization of their appearance impossible. However, structures of this sort may still survive, but their existence is best determined by courthouse research followed up by a visit to the site.

TRANSPORTATION SITES IN OKLAHOMA

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Alfalfa County:

1. Kiowa-Hennessey Cattle Trail trace: T 26 N, R 11 W; near Cherokee, OK (OLI)

Ellis County:

2. Packsaddle bridge: 6 miles north of Rolls, OK (OLI)

Garfield County:

3. Rock Island Depot: Garriatt Blvd., Enid, OK (N.R.)
4. Skeleton Stage Stand: 1 mile north of Enid, OK (OLI)
5. Railroad car: Covington, OK

Grant County:

6. Rock Island Park and Sewell's Stockade site: 4 miles north, 1 mile east of Highway 81; Pond Creek, OK

Harper County:

7. Santa Fe Depot: north of Turner Street, Buffalo, OK (OLI)
8. Great Western Cattle Trail traces: W 1/2 S 1/4, T 29 N, R 24 W; west of Buffalo, OK (OLI)
9. MKT Depot: Laverne, OK (N.R.)
10. Fort Dodge/Camp Sumpter Road traces: multiple places, (OLI)

Kay County:

11. Kay County Bridge: Ponca City, OK (OLI)
12. Kaw City Depot: Kaw City, OK (N.R.)
13. Roman arch bridge: Sec. 15, T 28 N, R 3 E; 6 miles NE of Newkirk, OK

14. Stone arch bridges (3): northwest of Ponca City on North Pecan Road, (OLI)

Major County:

15. Santa Fe Railroad Depot: 50 feet west of block 70, Fairview, OK (N.R.)

Noble County:

16. Suspension bridge: Sec. 5, T 14 N, R 2 E; 3 miles west of Morrison, OK (N.R.)

17. Old Santa Fe Depot: Tonkawa, OK (OLI)

Woodward County:

18. Fort Dodge/Camp Supply road traces: multiple places, (OLI)

Woods County:

19. Santa Fe Depot/Harvey House: Santa Fe tracks, Waynoka, OK (N.R.)

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