RESOURCE PROTECTION PLANNING PROJECT

TRANSPORTATION IN OKLAHOMA TO 1920

REGION SIX

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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

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.

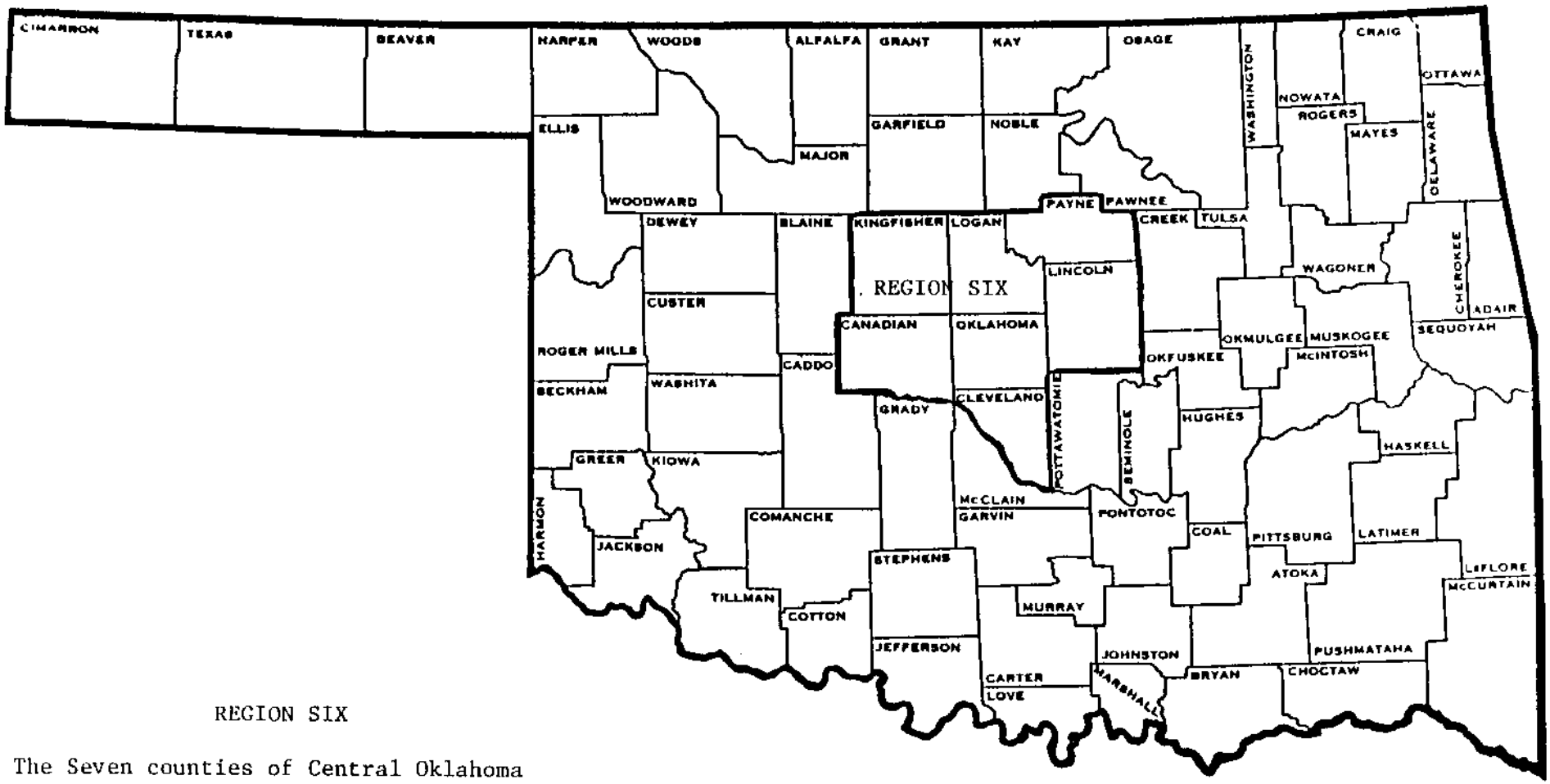
Concomitant with the advent of traction companies in the larger towns was the construction of section roads throughout what is now known as Oklahoma. In this instance, it was settlement that improved transportation and not vice versa. When Indian lands were allotted and Oklahoma Territory surveyed for 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.

REGION SIX

The Unassigned Lands, opened to white settlement in the late 1800s, comprise the majority of region six. Today these seven counties in central Oklahoma are the site of one of the most extensive transportation networks in the state due to their position as the geographical, political and commercial center of Oklahoma. In 1821 though, this section of what is now Oklahoma was largely unknown save by a few explorers. Yet, in a scant century the region would possess an extensive rail network, electric trolleys, paved highways, and the beginnings of air travel. Transportation networks were invaluable in the creation of a society that could carry on



REGION SIX

The Seven counties of Central Oklahoma

such developments and create Oklahoma, the forty-sixth state, out of a wilderness.

Waterways, particularly the Canadian River, constituted the first transportation system in region six. Though rivers such as the Canadian River and its north fork were not deep enough to support keelboat and steamer traffic, flatboats could navigate these streams to trade with the plains tribes in western Oklahoma. Such opportunities in western Oklahoma led Auguste Pierre Chouteau to erect two trading posts in what is now Cleveland county. Chouteau's first trading house in region six was in Camp Mason, a military post built in 1834 to provide a location for negotiations between the Plains Indians and the federal government on the eve of Indian removals to Oklahoma. Two years later, at the insistence of these tribes, Chouteau built another post in Cleveland county a short distance north of Lexington.

Waterways were a strong factor in the location of both posts, for they provided a ready means to move goods both to and from these stations. These streams also swayed Oklahoma's early economic alignment toward the South. Oklahoma's streams and rivers flow into the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico. Traders brought goods up the Mississippi from New Orleans to trade for furs, then Oklahoma's main export commodity, and carried the pelts back down the river to southern markets. This early relationship between Oklahoma and the South continued with the removal of the Five Civi-

lized Tribes from southern states to Oklahoma, then called Indian Territory, and did much to determine the state's economic and social characteristics.

Apart from the Panhandle and the southwest corner, the federal government allocated all of what is now Oklahoma to the Five Civilized Tribes as their new home. Region six became part of the Creek and Seminole nations, but these Indians chose to settle in the eastern half of their lands which left region six largely unsettled. One reason for this was the nature of the terrain in central Oklahoma, which did not resemble the woodlands of their former homes in the South. Also, hostile plains tribes impeded settlement in the region's western portion, which they regarded as their hunting grounds. Combined, these conditions retarded the development of central Oklahoma until after the Civil War.

Though unfamiliar terrain and hostile tribes checked the development of this territory, the discovery of gold in California aided in the advancement of transportation with the blazing of the California Road through region six in 1849. To cross the California Road, southern gold seekers came by way of steamboat to Fort Smith, where the road began, and proceeded overland through the southern section of region six to San Francisco. Though called a road, this path west was in fact little more than a rut in the prairie. Only the scars left by wagon wheels and hooves, along with a few landmarks, defined the trail. The California Road did

benefit Chouteau's post, the last stop east of Santa Fe, but was not of direct benefit to the development of region six. It was, however, the only way west to California that passed completely through Indian Territory, and linked central Oklahoma with Fort Smith and civilization.

In 1861, Indian Territory's economic ties with the South were among the reasons why the majority of the Five Civilized Tribes sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War. After their defeat, these tribes had to sign peace treaties with the victorious federal forces. As a result of these treaties, they lost about half of their lands and had to permit the passage of railroads through Indian Territory. These treaties, among other causes, eventually led to white settlement and the dissolution of tribal governments in 1907. Transportation contributed to these events through cattle drives, military posts, and the railroads. Cattle drives preceded the railroads and were caused by an overabundance of cattle in Texas combined with a shortage of beef in northern states. The opportunities presented by this situation prompted Texas cattlemen to blaze cattle trails north through Indian Territory to Kansas, where their herds could be shipped by rail to Chicago for slaughter.

Two of these trails, the Chisholm Trail and the Arbuckle Trail, crossed region six. The Chisholm Trail entered region six south of El Reno in Canadian county, where it split into two paths. These trails passed through what is now El Reno,

Oklahoma City, and its suburbs, met at the Dover Stage Stand in Kingfisher county, and split again to reach either Wichita or Dodge City, Kansas. The Arbuckle Trail, which crossed Indian Territory west of the Chisholm Trail, entered region six in Cleveland county and connected with the Chisholm Trail near Kingfisher in Kingfisher county.

In 1874 the army established Fort Reno to maintain the peace among the Plains Indians in western Oklahoma and protect the cattle drives. This post, located in what is now Canadian county, was the first permanent white settlement in central Oklahoma. A network of stage lines and wagon roads connected this post with other forts in Oklahoma as well as towns in Kansas and Texas. Stage lines such as the Star Mail Route brought visitors as well as mail to the post and the nearby Indian Agency at Darlington. Stage stands for the changing of teams were built at regular intervals along the trail, roughly every ten miles. Some of these stations, such as the Oklahoma Station and King Fisher's Station were later the sites of Oklahoma towns. Along with stage lines and wagon roads from Kansas, the military road out of Camp Supply in northwestern Oklahoma reached Fort Reno and the Darlington Agency to bring needed supplies.

These trails also benefitted the cattle drives, for they brought mail and supplies to the cowboys on the trails and ranches in region six. Even though the Creek and Seminole tribes had ceded a large tract of land as a resettlement area

for other tribes and freedmen in 1866, roughly two-thirds of the land remained unused, and came to be known as the Unassigned Lands. Cattlemen used this land for grazing, and built ranches to supply the reservations in western Oklahoma with beef. However, pressures to settle the Unassigned Lands soon caused the eviction of these cattlemen in preparation for the eventual homesteading of the region.

Railroads superceded this network of wagon and coach trails in the 1880s. Though a locomotive required water and fuel as did dray animals, it could carry massive cargoes anywhere in the nation more quickly and economically. Also, as a means to carry passengers it was unexcelled. The advantages of steam travel combined to revolutionize central Oklahoma, and was the single greatest factor in the region's growth.

The development of railroads coincided with popular demand to open the Unassigned Lands to settlement. In the late 1880s, while homesteaders illegally attempted to settle this region, the Southern Kansas Railway Company, an affiliate of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, gained permission from the federal government to construct a rail through Indian Territory. The proposed rail would enter Indian Territory at Arkansas City, Kansas, and continue south through Purcell in the Chickasaw Nation to Fort Worth, Texas. By 1887 this rail had crossed central Oklahoma where surveyors located several watering stations. Among these stations

were sites that later became the region's major cities: Guthrie, Edmond, Oklahoma City, and Norman.

However, the line could not fund its operations in the region simply because the Unassigned Lands lacked any significant population to use the railroad's services. To correct this situation the Santa Fe lobbied Congress for white settlement. Combined with popular demand, the lobbying of the railroad succeeded in 1888 and surveying of the region commenced. On April 22, 1889 the first region in Oklahoma opened to white settlers. The Santa Fe brought homesteaders into the Unassigned Lands from Purcell and Arkansas City. A number of trains departed from each point to convey people to the run, each literally covered with homesteaders. Due to the carrying capacity of these trains, what had once been a barren region of some 3,000 square miles suddenly had a population that exceeded 50,000.

Guthrie was the territorial capital, and had the highest population of any town in the newly settled lands. However, its ascendancy did not last, and Guthrie lost its standing to Oklahoma City. The railroads played a part in this transition, for rail connections were vital to a city's development. Oklahoma City proved more aggressive than Guthrie in acquiring additional rail connections, and was able to draw more business to the town. The most important of these connections was the Saint Louis and Oklahoma City Railway connecting Oklahoma City with Sapulpa in the Cherokee Nation.

Planned by Oklahoma City businessmen C.G. Jones and Henry Overholser in 1895 and completed in 1897, the railroad gave Oklahoma City a connection to markets in Kansas City and Saint Louis that Guthrie lacked. Due to its superior transportation network Oklahoma City attracted more business, and by 1900 had taken Guthrie's position as the pre-eminent city in Oklahoma Territory.

As the towns in central Oklahoma grew, there became a need for a public transit facility. In region six, four cities possessed such services. Oklahoma City was the first, when it chartered the Metropolitan Railway Company to operate an electric traction service in 1902. Guthrie installed its own service in 1903, followed by El Reno in 1908. By 1916 these lines had come under the control of the Oklahoma Railway Company, centered in Oklahoma City, and interurban service had been extended to Edmond and Norman. Not satisfied with passenger traffic alone, the Oklahoma Railway Company later began a freight switching service in the packing house and stockyard district of south Oklahoma City. This freight service facilitated the transport of goods among different rail lines and its revenue helped the company face the early years of the Great Depression. The fortunes of the interurbans increased during World War II, but expanded highway construction in the 1930s and 1940s helped doom the company. With better roads and the greater availability of gasoline after 1945 private transportation became more

feasible, which resulted in the end of the Oklahoma Railway Company in 1947.

Though a later innovation than interurbans, automobile travel has enjoyed a long history in central Oklahoma. In 1911 residents of Oklahoma City owned twenty-five per cent of all automobiles in the state, an indication of the area's wealth. This high incidence of automobile ownership in and about Oklahoma City also influenced early highway legislation in Oklahoma. In 1911 proposed legislation would have placed a horsepower tax on all automobiles in the state to fund the Oklahoma State Highway Department. Representatives from Oklahoma County opposed this levy, and eventually succeeded in removing it from the bill. The vested interest in automobiles in Oklahoma county also influenced the location of the first paved highway in Oklahoma, Highway 77. This road, completed in 1930, passed through Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and Norman. In that same year road crews also completed a paved freeway between Oklahoma City and Tulsa. With these improvements to the state's road system, transportation in region six closely resembled present conditions, including the parking meters on Oklahoma City streets.

Together, these events changed central Oklahoma from a wilderness to the state's most heavily urbanized region. From Chouteau's first trading post on the Canadian River to Oklahoma City's traffic jams, the impact of transportation was evident. Without continual progress in the creation of

newer, more extensive transportation networks, the development of central Oklahoma and the United States as a whole would have been seriously delayed. However, the presence of transportation links in region six facilitated settlement, helped to attract business and industry, and aided in town development. These events have resulted in the creation of Oklahoma's largest metropolitan complex, the veritable center of the fourty-sixth state.

PROPERTY TYPE ANALYSIS FOR TRANSPORTATION SITES IN REGION SIX

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 six 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. However, due to the amount of land development that has taken place in region six, remnants of these trails will be few.

2. River crossings: These sites are likely to be found in conjunction with the roads and trails of region six. 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. A good example of an early railroad depot is the Stillwater Station, a depot in Stillwater that has been adapted for use as a

restaurant. Though the interior has undergone much alteration to accomodate diners, the exterior has been carefully restored. The floorplan of this depot was linear with two waiting rooms, one for blacks and the other for whites. In general, such buildings are rectangular in shape with a hipped roof supported by outrigger brackets. Clay tile was an often used roofing material. Exterior walls were frequently brick on the lower half with stucco above, while other structures were clapboard sided. Also, 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 six and the generally uniform appearance of the depots, further structures should be located with more careful research.

A form of transportation similar to the railroads were traction lines, also called interurbans or trolleys. Structures associated with these lines are in many ways similar to those of railroads. The terminals of traction lines generally resembled train depots with the linear floor plan and two waiting rooms, but the passenger platforms differed. In interurban stations, the platform was covered by a large, gabled awning and the freight dock was much smaller if it existed at all. Another difference between interurban terminals and train depots lay in the facade appearance. While train depots closely resembled one another

and were free-standing structures, trolley terminals were usually built into a streetscape, and their appearance differed according to the tastes of each traction company and the prevailing construction methods of the town. Finally, rails imbedded in street paving provide the most telling evidence of an interurban in a town. These rails are rarely removed due to the damage such removal would cause to the streets, and are instead paved over. However, in many places the paving will wear down and expose the rails.

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 six. However, a significant number of people owned automobiles at that time, and these vehicles needed fuel and maintenance. Motels had yet to appear in any significant number, simply because long distance travel by automobile was still impractical. Private garages in towns should exist though, and will closely resemble contemporary free standing garages. Filling stations should also still be in evidence. A typical structure will consist of a rectangular brick or stuccoed one

story building with a hipped or gabled roof that extends to form an awning over the refueling area. Clay tile or composition shingles were the predominant roofing material. On the sides of the building, large overhead or swinging doors on one or both sides open to reveal mechanic's bays. In some abandoned stations, or those that have been converted to other use, the old fuel pumps will still be present and will aid in the dating of the structure.

TRANSPORTATION SITES IN OKLAHOMA

REGION SIX:

Canadian County:

1. Rock Island Depot: 600 West Wade, El Reno, OK (N.R.)
2. Rock Island District Office Building: 415 West Watts, El Reno, OK (OLI)
3. North Canadian River Bridge: 4 miles NW of El Reno, OK
4. Chisholm Trail traces: Piedmont, OK (OLI)

Cleveland County:

5. Santa Fe Depot: 100 East Comanche, Norman, OK
6. Truss bridge: Highway 39, east of Purcell, OK
7. Interurban Station: 105 West Main Street, Norman, OK (OLI)
8. Canadian River Bridge: Sec. 6-7, Highway 77, vicinity of Purcell, OK

Kingfisher County:

9. Kingfisher Stage Station site: Kingfisher, OK (OLI)
10. Buffalo Station Stand: Hennessey, OK (OLI)

Lincoln County:

11. Ozark Trail: same route as Highway 66 through Lincoln County (OLI)
12. Western Shawnee Cattle Trail traces: north and south of Stroud, OK

Logan County:

13. Dodsworth Stage Stand: east of Guthrie, OK (OLI)

Oklahoma County:

14. Chisholm Trading Post: SE 1/4 Sec. 30, T 12 N, R 4 W; West Tenth Street, east end of bridge over North Canadian River, Oklahoma City, OK (OLI)

15. Rock Island Union Depot: 300 SW Seventh Street, Oklahoma City, OK (N.R.)

16. Wells Fargo and Co. Livery Stable: 115 East Reno, Oklahoma City, OK (N.R.)

Payne County:

17. Morrison Suspension Bridge: spanning Black Bear Creek, vicinity of Morrison, OK (OLI)

18. Norfolk Bridge: 1.6 miles south of Yale, OK on Highway 18

19. Santa Fe Depot: 400 East Tenth Street, Stillwater, OK

20. Santa Fe Depot: South Kings Highway, 1 1/2 miles south of Highway 33, Cushing, OK (OLI)

21. Santa Fe and MKT Railroad Gauntlet Bridge: 1 mile south of Norfolk Road, Yale, OK

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