

Chapter 14

The Best of Times, the Worst of Times



In this chapter:

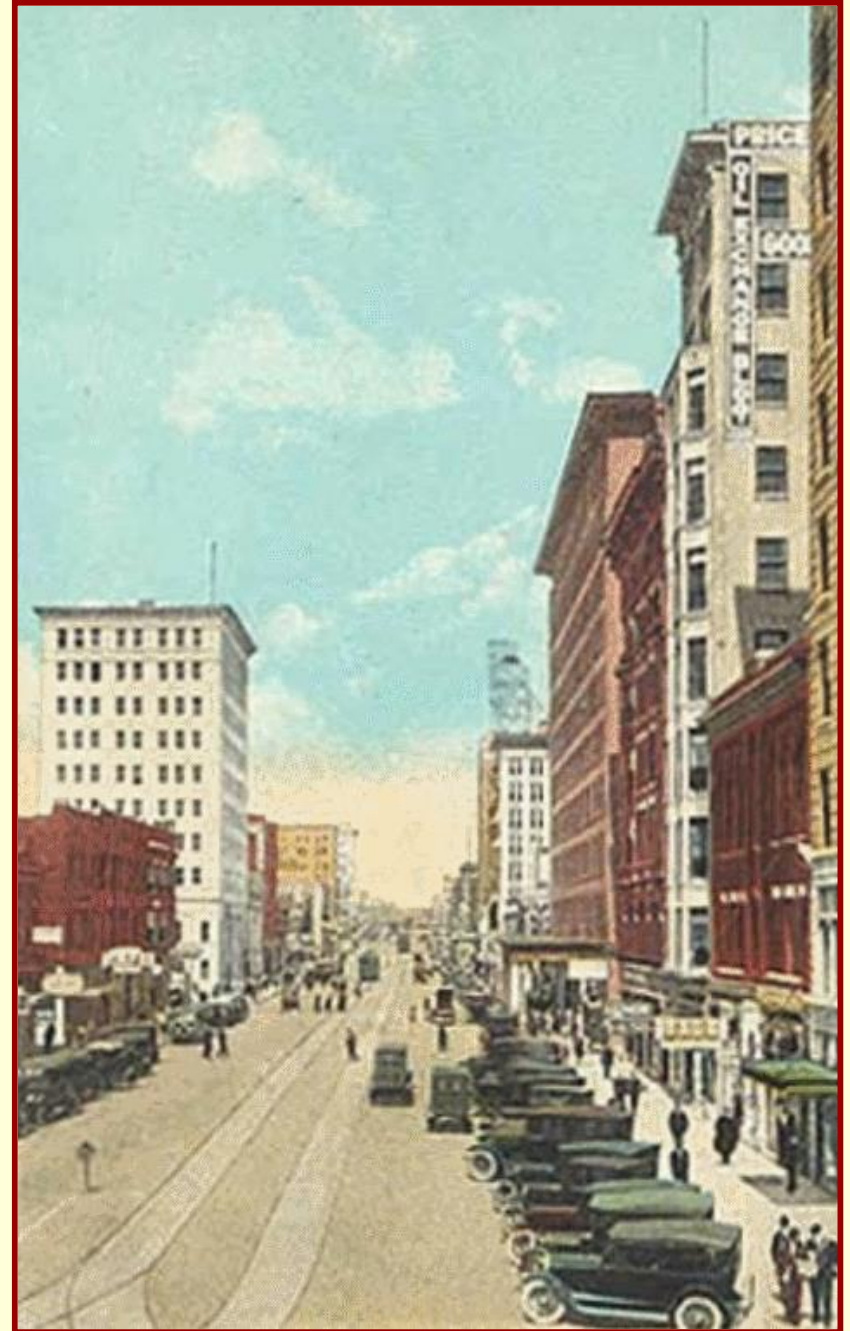
- ❖ *In the 1920s, America will be celebrated as a world power, but racial and political problems in Oklahoma will be a bad omen for the decade ahead.*
- ❖ *The Great Depression will test the nation's abilities to adapt, and will lead to innovative social programs.*
- ❖ *Despite the worst drought in history and a vicious crime wave, Oklahoma's inventors and artists will help lead the nation forward.*

Section 1: The Roaring Twenties



*A wide range
of events unfolded in
Oklahoma in the 1920s.
Cities got paved streets,
automobiles, and
skyscrapers.*

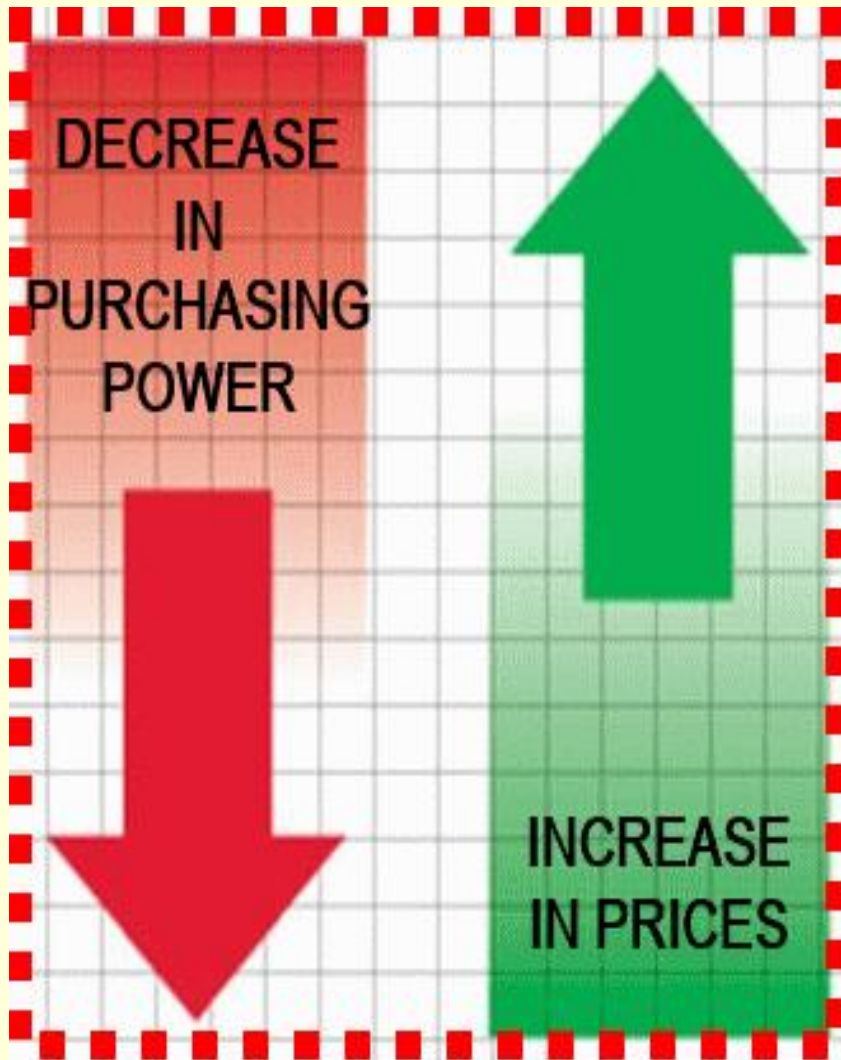
*The state's population
increased to more
than 2 million and
began shifting
from rural to urban.*



*Agriculture that had boomed during World War I
began to cut back, and farm prices tumbled.
Many farmers went broke or lost their land.*



Companies that had expanded output to meet wartime orders also began reductions.



High demand and short supplies led to a period of inflation, where prices increased but purchasing power decreased.

Many workers demanded higher wages and labor unions called for strikes.

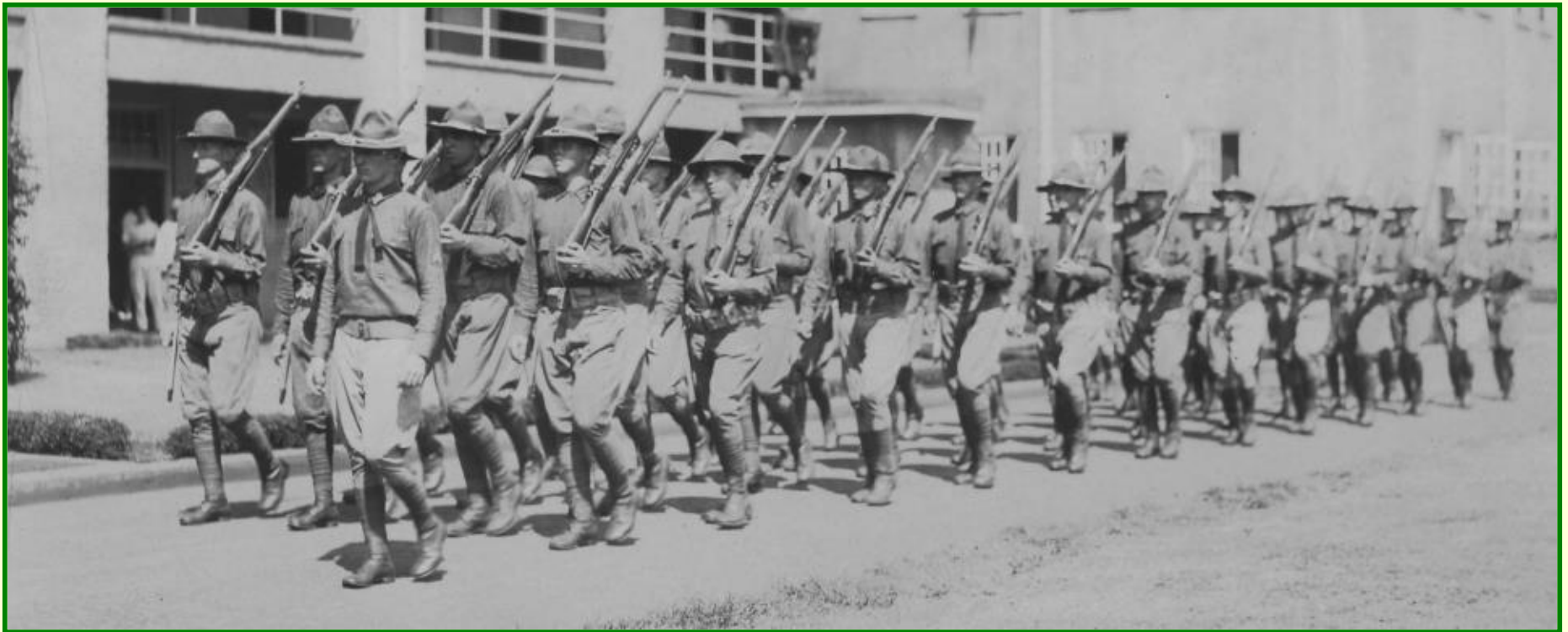
About 9,000 Oklahoma coal miners joined a nationwide strike when an agreement couldn't be reached for better hours and pay.



Local authorities declared martial law in the troubled coal region of eastern Oklahoma.

Martial law is a temporary use of military rule when civilian authority breaks down.

The strike was settled a month later, and martial law was lifted.



*In 1917, Russia had adopted Communism,
an economic and political system where
every industry is controlled by its workers.*



Many business owners worried that labor problems were part of the international spread of Communism.



**The “Red Scare”
that swept the
country after the
war caused
people to be
suspicious of
anything that
seemed to be
“anti-American.”**

These unsettled times led to the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group that had terrorized freedmen after the Civil War.

More than 100,000 Oklahomans were members.



Their targets included Blacks, Catholics, Jews, immigrants, and union workers.

They used cross burnings, whippings, and lynchings to enforce their concepts of morality.

Just north of downtown Tulsa was the prosperous African American neighborhood of Greenwood.

About 15,000 people lived in the area known as “The Black Wall Street.”



**The Tulsa
Race Massacre,
one of the worst in
American history,
took place in and
around Greenwood
between May 30
and June 2, 1921.**

*Many historians believe it was
might have been caused by
a piece of faulty technology.*





*Dick Rowland,
a 19-year-old
black shoeshine man
working in a
downtown Tulsa
office building,
stepped into
an elevator
because he was
going to the
“colored” washroom
on another floor.*

*The white elevator operator
was 17-year-old Sarah Page.*



*The elevator lurched as it began to rise, and
Rowland lost his balance and grabbed her arm.
Startled, the girl screamed. Rowland ran away.*

*A white clerk working
in the office building
immediately called
the police, but
he reported the
incident as an
attempted assault.*

*Rowland was arrested
the next morning and
was taken to the
Tulsa County Courthouse.*





The afternoon edition of the Tulsa Tribune newspaper published an inaccurate report of the incident.

Hundreds of angry whites began gathering at the courthouse, many armed with guns.

The sheriff tried to calm the crowd.

A few armed black men went to the Courthouse to support the sheriff. Around 10 p.m., a shot was fired. The white mob, numbering almost 2,000, chased the African Americans back toward Greenwood.



Almost immediately, local authorities began rounding up blacks and taking them into custody.

More than 4,000 men, women, and children were detained and treated as prisoners.



Then whites began setting fire to black homes and businesses throughout the neighborhood.

When firemen arrived to put out the flames, the white mob kept them away at gunpoint.



Local residents reported that whites even hired airplanes to shoot at people on the ground and drop dynamite on their houses.

In the end, the entire Greenwood District had been reduced to ashes.





*National Guard
troops from
Oklahoma City
finally arrived
by train on
June 2.*

*Martial law
was declared
and order
was restored.*



The official death toll was 26 blacks and 13 whites.

The Tulsa World estimated it was closer to 100.

There were reports of the bodies of black people being dumped in the Arkansas River or buried in mass graves. No one was ever arrested for the loss of life and property.

THE MORNING TULSA DAILY WORLD FINAL EDITION

VOL. XV, NO. 244 Tulsa, Oklahoma Thursday, June 2, 1921 14 PAGES PRICE 5 CENTS

DEAD ESTIMATED AT 100; CITY IS QUIET

\$2,000 TO START FUND FOR RELIEF

The World to Accept Contributions to Relieve Negro Sufferers

TO WIPE OUT STAIN

Only by Generosity Can Tulsa People Remove Black Blot of Blood and Fire

BUSINESS MEN TO MEET

Efforts of Rebuilding District to Be Taken Up at Meeting Probably Today

The World's Relief Fund.
The Daily World \$1,000
Drs. 1628 North Denver 100
John H. L. Standeven 100
Total \$1,200

A red and black blot of shame was colored in blood and fire on the old reputation of Tulsa yesterday. Thousands of negroes were homeless last night and hundreds of the city went hungry despite the rapid and untiring efforts of the people.

It was learned last night that

The Known Dead

The following is the latest record of the known dead from the rioting Tuesday night and Wednesday day.

The **Shelley Morgan**, 21 years of age, Wynona, Okla. This was one of the bodies which had been unidentified up until late Wednesday afternoon. His brother, James of Wynona, has been notified of the death and will arrive sometime this morning to claim the body.

CLUB BRUMATH, 24 years of age, shot early Tuesday evening died at 11 o'clock Tuesday night in the Oklahoma hospital. He is the son of Mrs. William Ingram of Muskogee, Kan.

CARL D. LUTTICH, 28, Randall, Kan., shot through the breast, died Wednesday morning at the Oklahoma hospital.

W. H. BAKER, 26, Navasota, had died at the Oklahoma hospital Wednesday afternoon.

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NEGROES GLADLY ACCEPT GUARDS

Homeless Taken to Ball Park Offer No Objections to Plan

A SCENE OF PATHOS

Many Refugees Lugged Their Belongings With Them Through Boiling Heat

ALL FED BY RELIEF GROUPS

Great Boxes of Food Carried to McNulty Park by Red Cross and Others

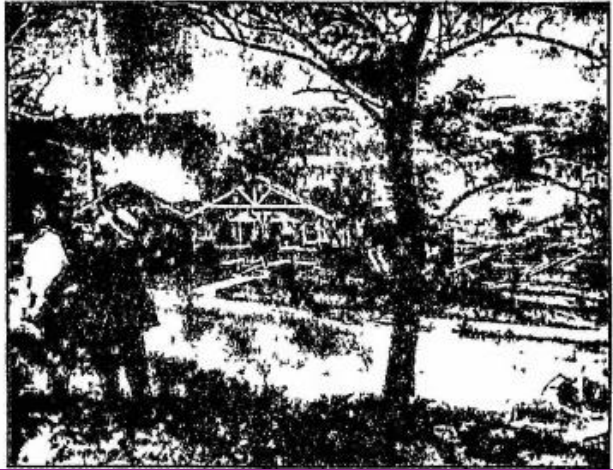
By FAITH HIRSHON

"Get back, please, get back!" And the order was emphasized with drawn pistols and bayonets.

The speakers were uniformed guardsmen outside of McNulty park yesterday when scores of the curious pressed up against the gates and made it almost impossible for the negroes being constantly unloaded out in the street to get through. Thousands of negroes from all over the city were being carried in cars and trucks, piled up by armed men to the park and in Convention hall for safety.

To a group of white men standing

In the Wake of Tulsa's Race War



5,000 NEGRO REFUGEES GUARDED IN CAMP AT COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS

Troops Patrolling Streets and General Barrett Declares Situation Is Well Under Control; Every Precaution Taken to Prevent Recurrence of Trouble; Many Negroes Ask to Be Taken to Places of Safety; "Little Africa" Smoking Ruins.

With martial law in force, forbidding the indiscriminate use of the streets to vehicles and pedestrians until 8 o'clock Thursday morning, with 5,000 negro refugees confined in the buildings at the county fair grounds east of the city, with "Little Africa" in ashes, and with Adj. Gen. Charles F. Barrett here in command of seven companies of national guardsmen, Tulsa is comparatively quiet after a night and part of a day of race rioting.

Official figures on the number of dead are not obtainable because of the chaos and disorder that have accompanied the riots and the lack of time by relief workers to keep an accurate count of casualties. They are unofficially placed at 100—80 negroes and 20 whites.

"We have the situation well under control," Adjutant General Barrett stated at 8:30 o'clock. "We do not anticipate any further rioting, although nothing has been overlooked as a precaution against its recurrence. With Tulsa under martial law, which is now in force, we expect to see rapid readjustment of conditions."

Thirty-five square blocks had been destroyed.

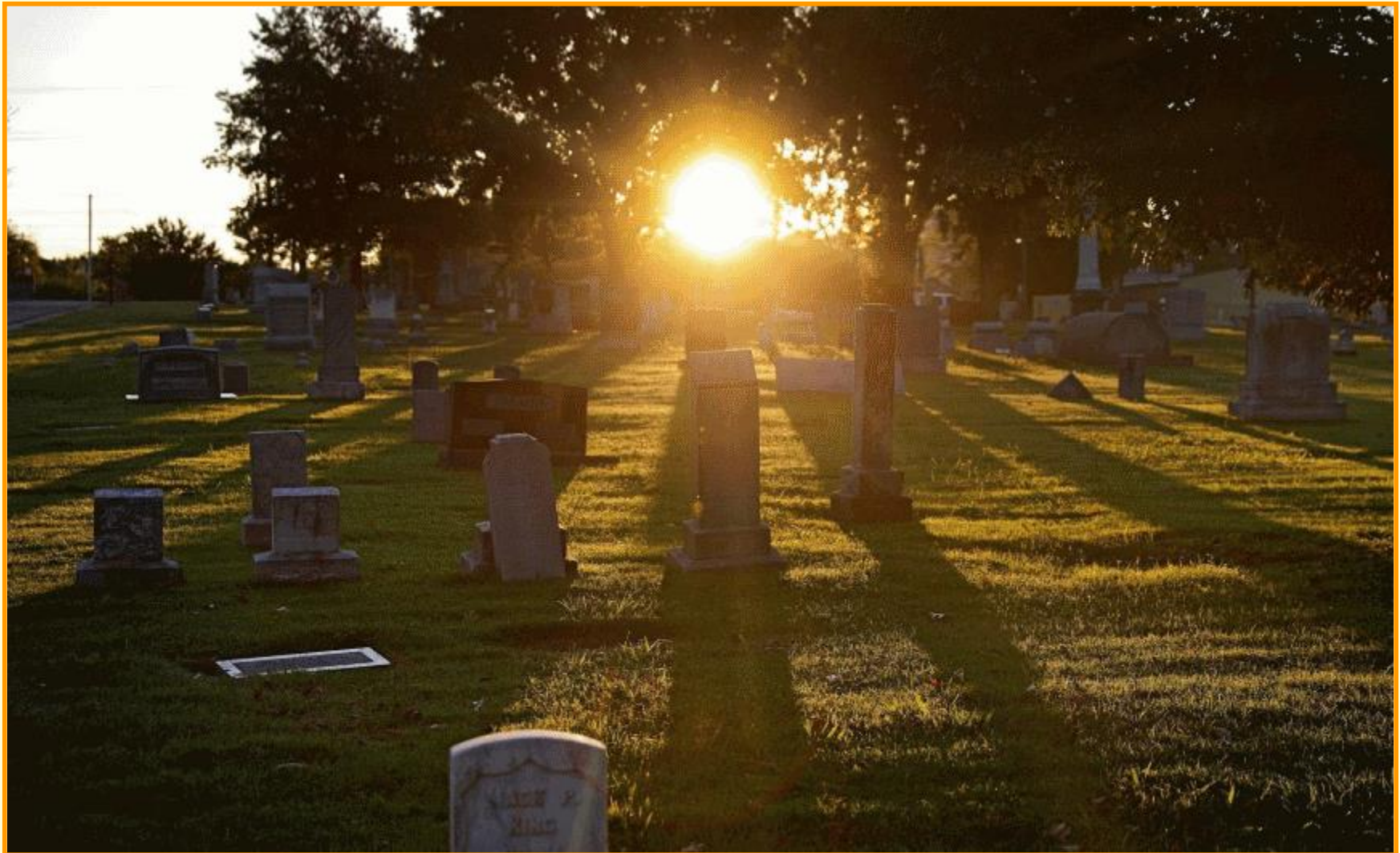
*Thousands of African Americans
decided not to move back to Greenwood.*

*The community was eventually rebuilt, but
it never achieved the status it held before the riot.*

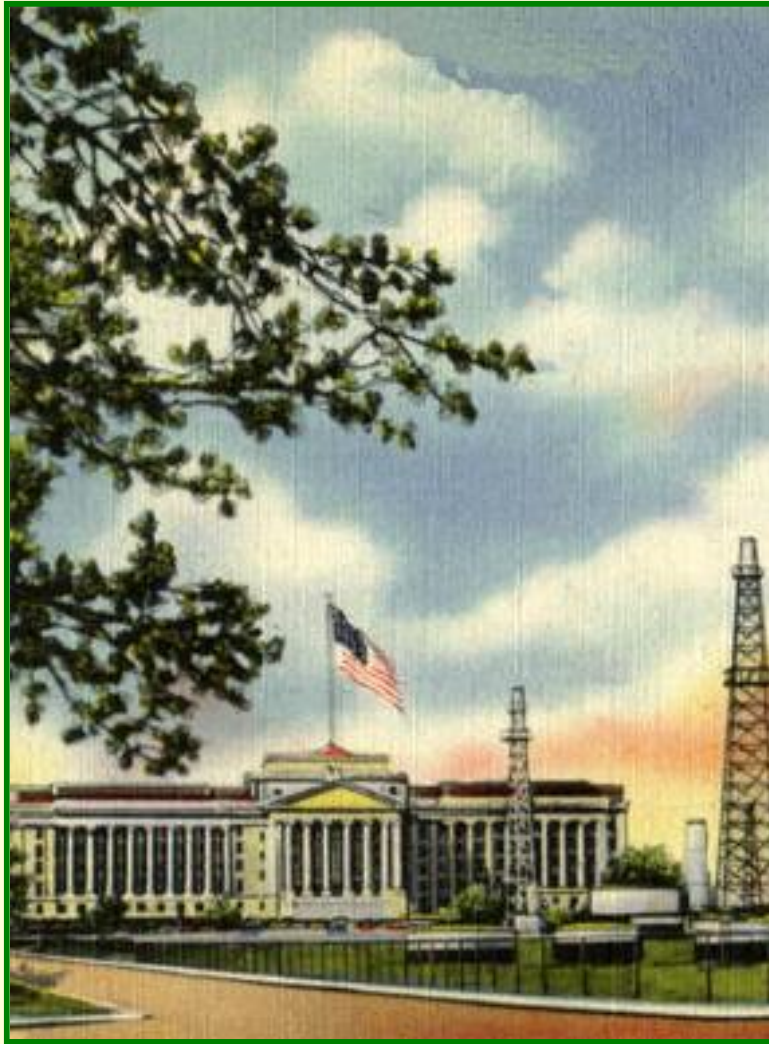
Sarah Page refused to file charges against Dick Rowland.



In early 2019, the City of Tulsa began an investigation into possible mass graves on the Arkansas River.



**After the war, oil prices also dropped dramatically,
but that didn't stop the opening of new fields.**



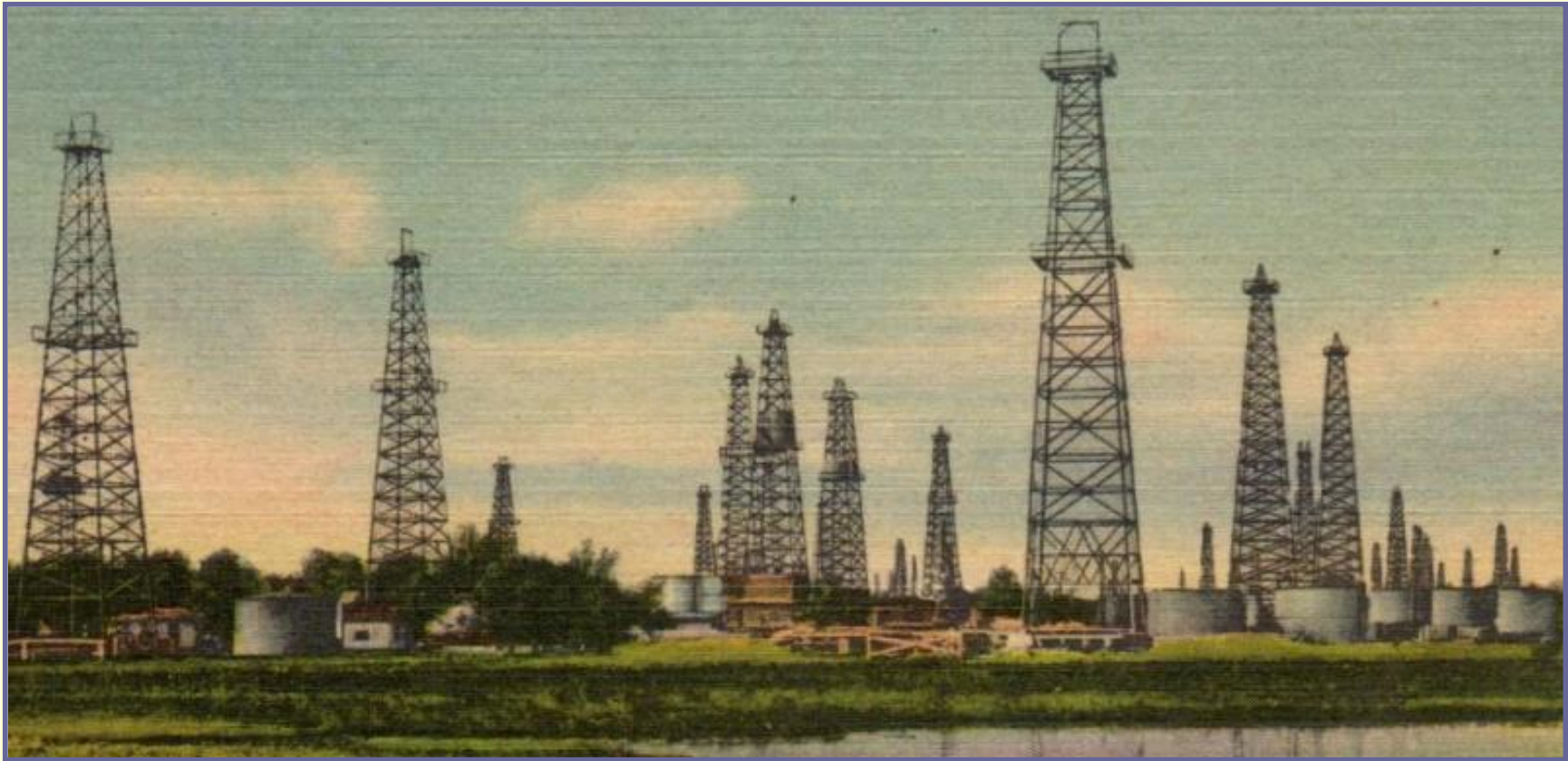
**By the 1920s,
Oklahoma was
the leading
oil producer
in the nation.**

*Oil derricks dotted
the Oklahoma City landscape,
and even appeared on the lawn
of the State Capitol.*

Petrochemicals are made from oil by-products.

The first petrochemical plant in Oklahoma was built in Tallant, a town in Osage County.

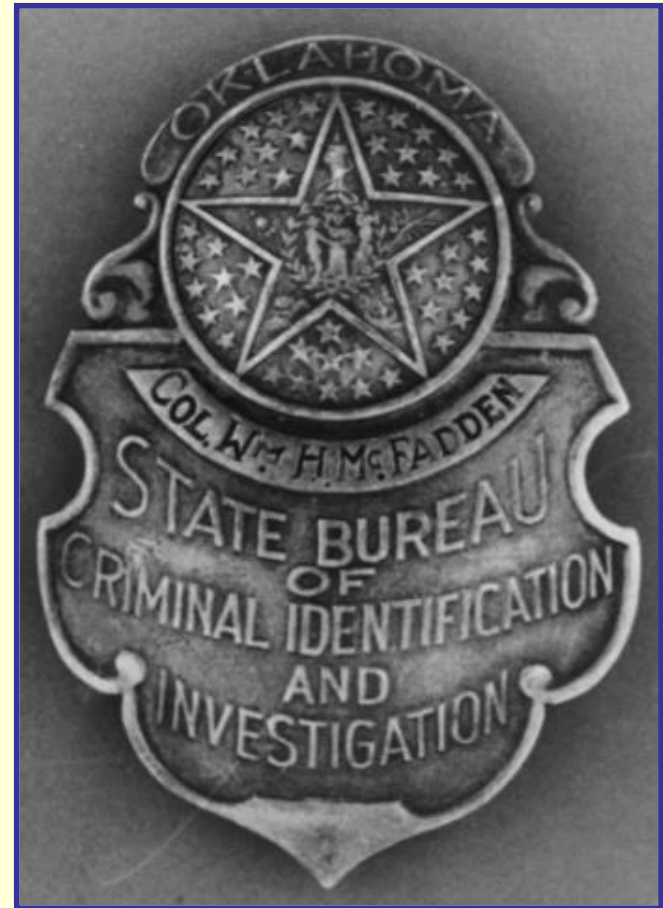
The plant produced formaldehyde, rubbing alcohol, refrigerants, adhesives, and disinfectants.



In 1925, at least 20 Osage Indians were murdered by non-Indians trying to inherit their headrights.

**Governor Jack Walton,
working with
federal authorities,
created the
Oklahoma State
Bureau of Investigation.**

*Within a year, its agents had
reduced crime significantly.*



Interest in flying came early to Oklahoma.

The Henry Post Army Airfield was established at Fort Sill prior to WWI.

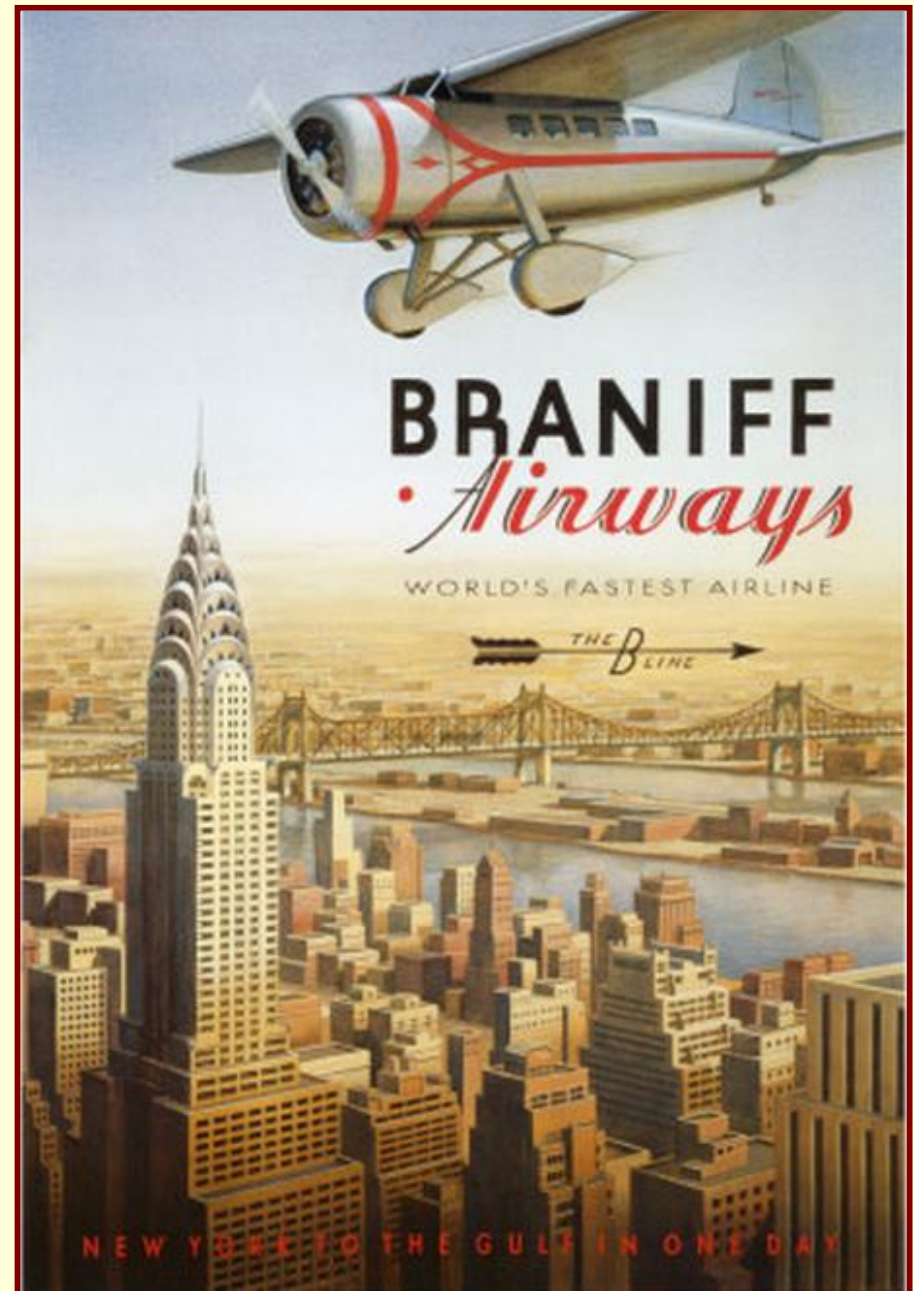


Many pilots returning from the war became barnstormers, giving rides and exhibitions.



**Braniff Airways,
headquartered in
Oklahoma City,
started in
the late 1920s
when brothers
Paul and Tom Braniff
bought a plane
for \$11,000.**

*It had daily flights between
Oklahoma City and Tulsa
and later flew internationally.*



**Another world famous aviator, Wiley Post,
made Oklahoma City his home base.**



- *Post was a barnstormer and a skydiver.*
- *He set a record time for flying solo around the world.*
- *He set dozens of other speed records.*
- *He invented the pressure suit that allows pilots to fly at extremely high altitudes.*

Transcontinental Air Transport was an air-rail route created to cut coast-to-coast travel time in half.

The second leg of the journey was a flight from Columbus, Ohio, to Waynoka, Oklahoma.



In Waynoka, passengers went to the Harvey House, one of the first restaurant chains in the U.S.

*After dinner, they boarded a train to Clovis, New Mexico,
where they connected to a flight to take them to Los Angeles.*



*The Harvey House dining room in Waynoka
became a national celebrity hot-spot.*

*Famous customers included entertainer Will Rogers
and aviators Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart.*



*Earhart also stopped in Enid in 1931
to demonstrate a new autogiro (helicopter).*





By 1929, more than 23 million automobiles were registered in the United States.



Although there were thousands of cars in Oklahoma, there were even more farm trucks and tractors.

**Cyrus Avery of Tulsa
was appointed
to the U.S. Bureau
of Public Roads.**

He had championed The Ozark Trails.

**Congress had proposed
a highway from
Virginia to California.**

Avery had a better idea.



Avery suggested avoiding the Rocky Mountains by going southwest from Chicago to the Pacific Coast.

In 1926, the highway was designated Route 66.

It would pass through Oklahoma and seven other states.



*To promote the opening of the new Route 66,
a transcontinental footrace was held in 1928.*



*“The Bunion Derby,”
from Los Angeles to
New York City,
was won by Andy Payne
of Foyil, Oklahoma.*

*There were 275 runners competing
for the \$25,000 prize money.*

*The race started on March 4 and
ended 83 days later on May 26.*

It covered a total of 3,422 miles.

Popular entertainment included silent movies, jazz music, and Vaudeville variety shows.

Rudolph Valentino (left) was a favorite movie star, Louis Armstrong (center) helped launch the Jazz Age, and Al Jolson (right) was a top singer.



**A dry goods store in Guthrie was converted into
a Vaudeville house called the Pollard Theatre.**

It was later remodeled as a movie theatre, but now stages live productions.



Radio had as much impact as the automobile.

*Two years after the first public broadcast,
there were more than 400,000 radios across the U.S.*

The first radio
station west of the
Mississippi River
was WKY in
Oklahoma City,
which began
airing programs
and music in 1922.





Oklahoma's own
Will Rogers
went from roping
in Wild West Shows to
performing in Vaudeville,
to writing for newspapers,
then to radio and movies.

*He particularly liked
making fun of politicians,
but said "I never met a
man I didn't like."*

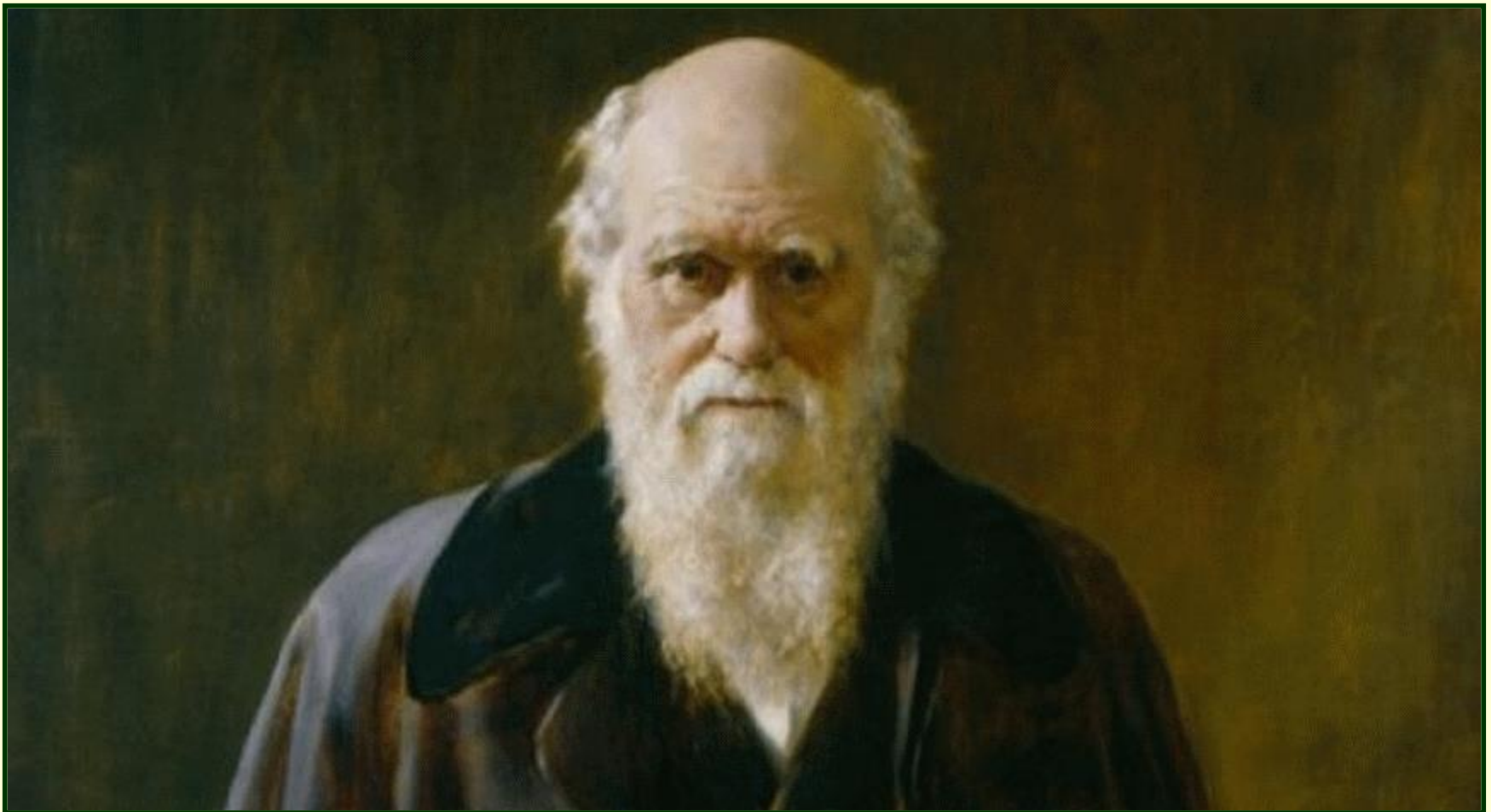
*He was best friends with
Oklahoma aviator Wiley Post.*

Notable politicians of the 1920s included Mary Alice Robertson, the first woman elected to Congress, and Jack Walton, the first Oklahoma governor to be impeached.



Oklahoma also became the first state to try to prevent the teaching of the theory of evolution.

State law provided free textbooks to public schools, but specifically excluded books which included Charles Darwin's work.



*As the roar of the early 1920s began to die out,
newer – and bigger – problems stormed in.*



Section 2: The Great Depression



The bad times Oklahoma had experienced spread across the country and became The Great Depression.



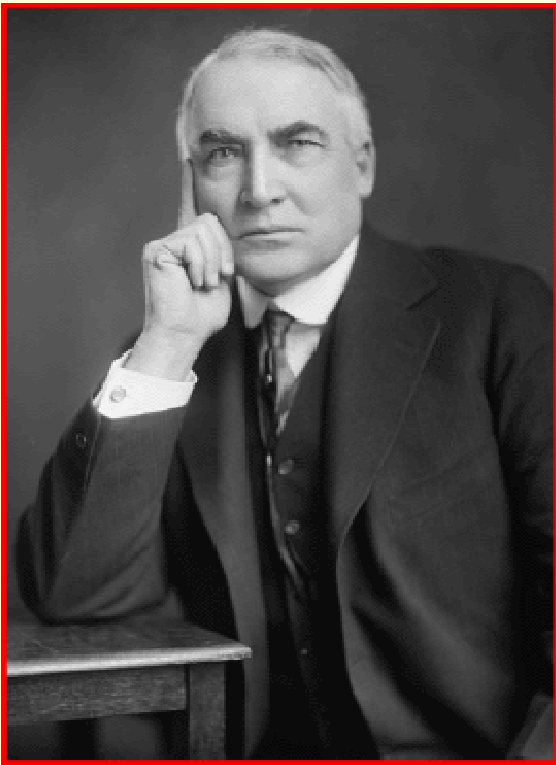
Many people often bought expensive items on credit - a “buy now, pay later” option.



The problem was that people's incomes had been shrinking since the war, and they wouldn't be making enough money to be able to “pay later.”

**In the 1920s, the three Republican presidents –
Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and
Herbert Hoover – all championed high tariffs.**

*Tariffs (taxes) made foreign items more expensive than American products.
But Americans needed cheaper prices, so consumer spending plummeted.*



*Many banks
in the United States
and in other nations
made unwise loans,
which caused an
unstable worldwide
banking system.*

*Many of these
“bad” loans were for
real estate markets
like Florida.*



*Oddly, the Stock Market continued to rise.
It was a place where shares of ownership
in corporations were bought and sold.*

*The wealthiest Americans were buying stocks at high prices,
believing that the value of the stocks would continue to rise.*



**On October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed.
Investors tried to sell their stocks at any price.
By the end of “Black Tuesday,” thousands
of Americans had lost everything.**



*Demand for products dropped, closing factories.
Nearly 40% of the population was out of work.
By 1933, more than 5,000 banks had failed.*





*The Depression
affected everyone.*

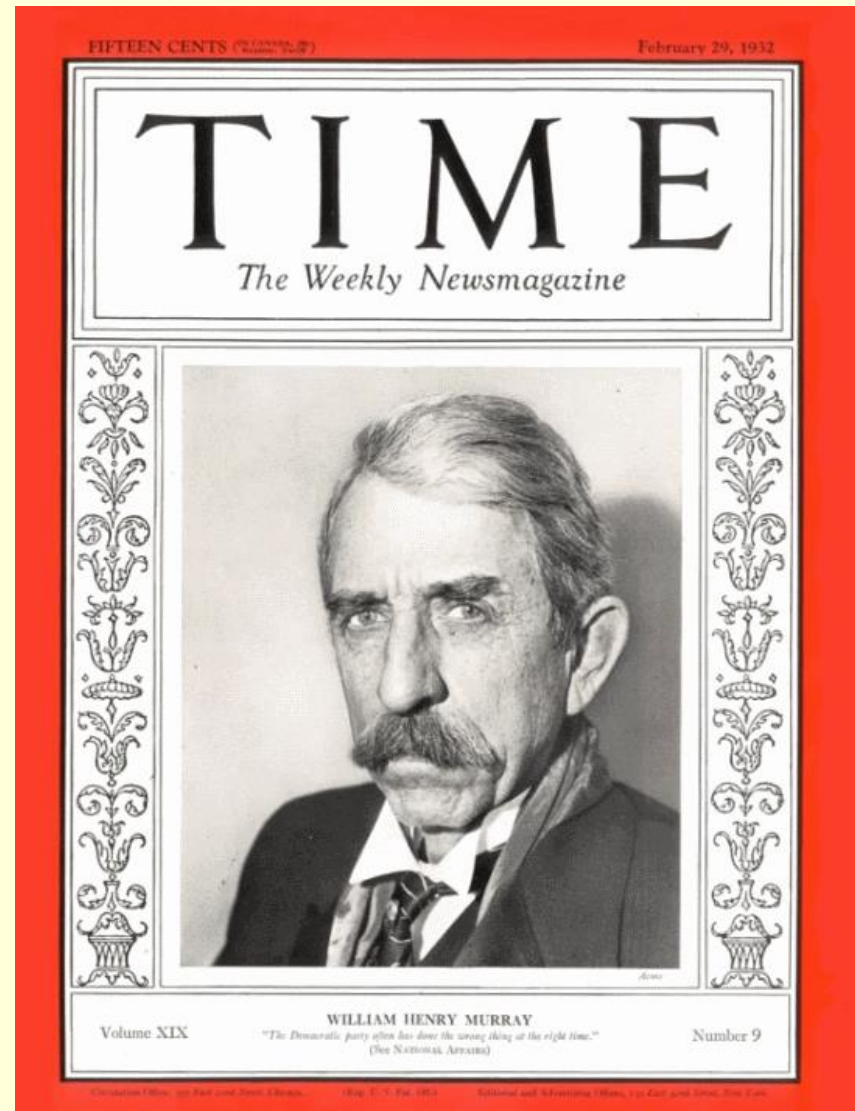
*Oklahoma's farmers
couldn't afford
new clothing, so
feed sacks were
often used to make
dresses and shirts.*

*In large cities,
churches and charities
set up soup kitchens.*

A strong but controversial leader emerged to take Oklahoma through these dark days.

William H.
“Alfalfa Bill” Murray,
was elected governor
in 1930 by promising
emergency relief.

*The Legislature then
appropriated money
for food rations and free seed.*

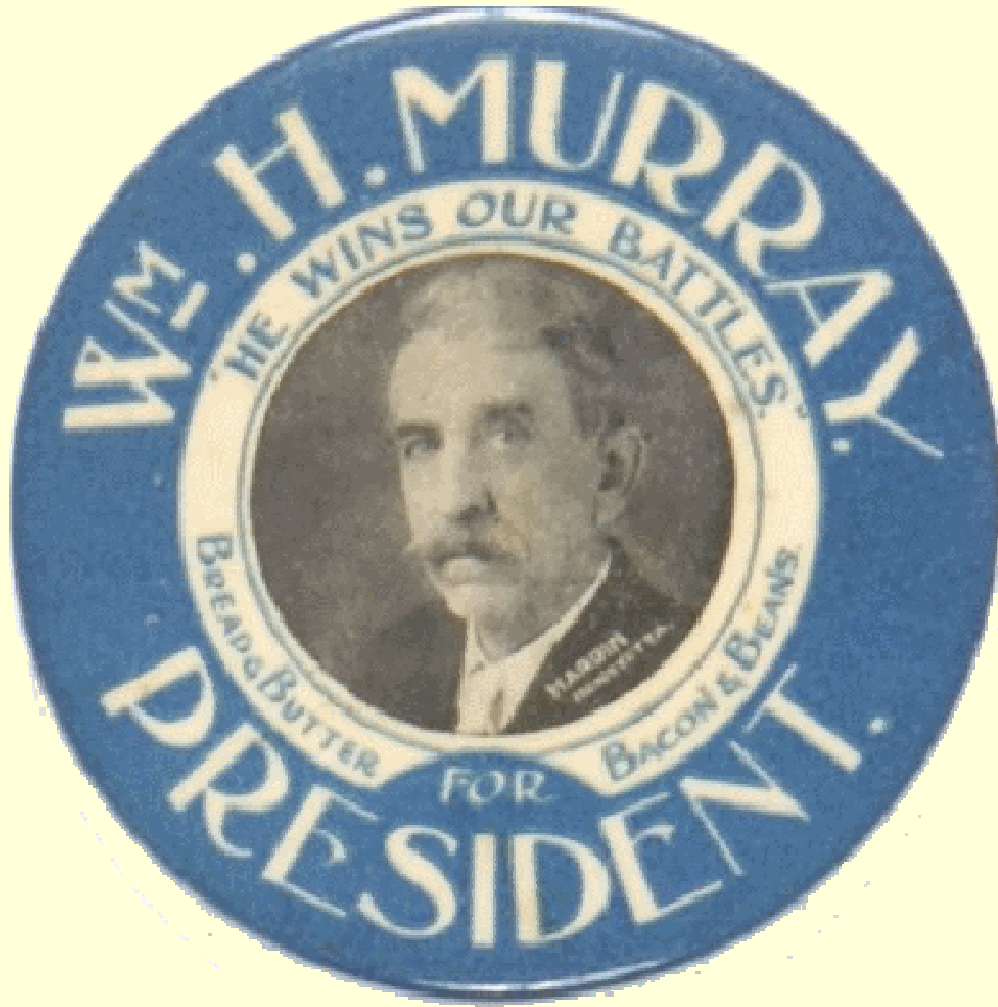


Murray often used National Guard troops and martial law to protect the state's interests.

He shut down all the oilfields to get prices under control, and nearly went to war with Texas over a toll bridge on the Red River.



Murray decided to run for president in 1932, ultimately losing every primary election he entered.



He was no doubt hurt by his racism. If elected, he said he would fight "The 3 C's: Corporations, Carpetbaggers, and Coloreds."

Despite his background, two counties are named for him.

**The new president
elected in 1932 was
Franklin D. Roosevelt,
and he was committed to
easing the burden of
The Great Depression.**

*He assembled advisors from
all over the country to develop programs
to create jobs, to strengthen the economy,
and to improve society.*



Roosevelt's plan was called "The New Deal."

Most programs were known by their initials, and were collectively called "The Alphabet Soup."

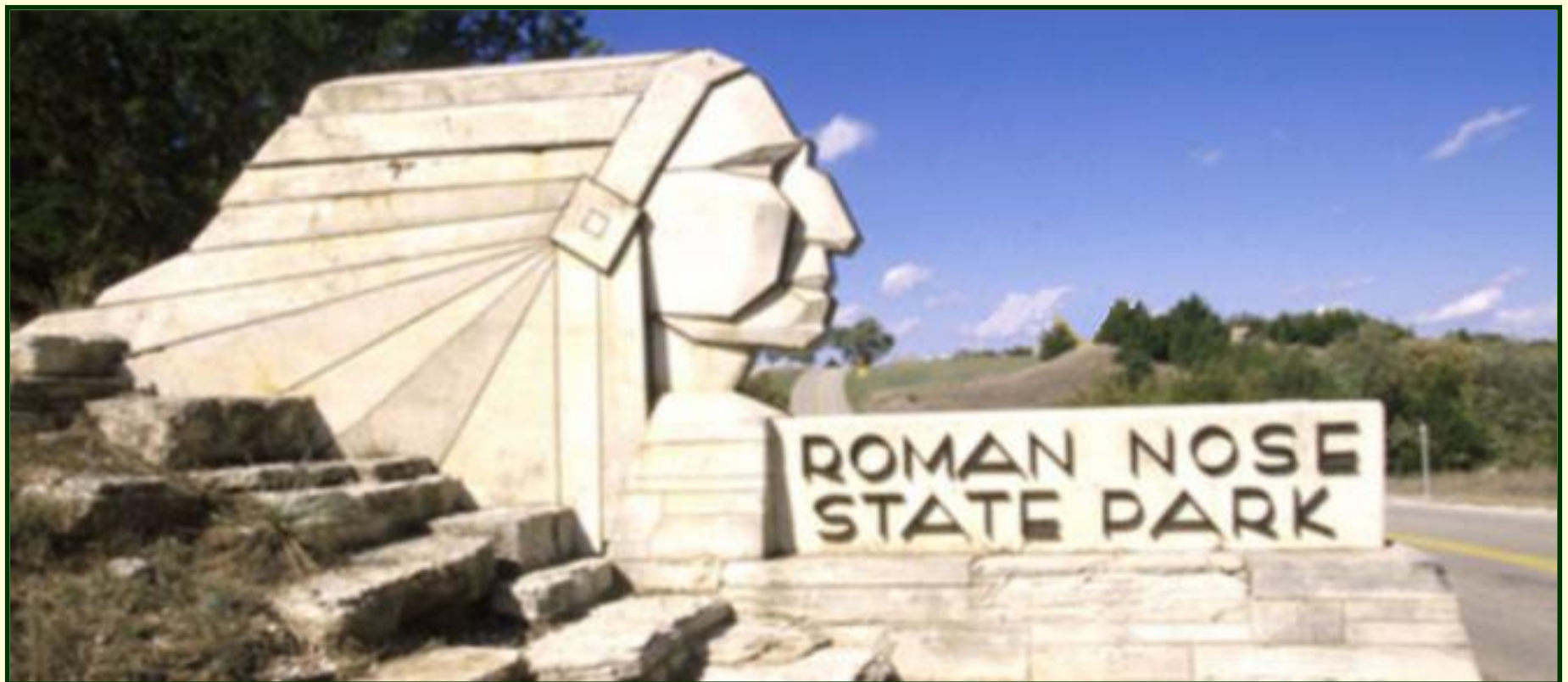


- *The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built state and national parks.*
- *The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) insured banks against failure.*
- *The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) brought power lines to remote areas.*
- *The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) regulated the Stock Market.*
- *The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) provided home loans to low-income families.*

Civilian Conservation Corps projects in Oklahoma included seven state parks.

*The parks are Lake Murray, Roman Nose, Beavers Bend, Robbers Cave,
Boiling Springs, Osage Hills, and Quartz Mountain.*

Nationwide, CCC workers also planted more than 3 billion trees.



A monthly check to you -

FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE
•• BEGINNING WHEN YOU ARE 65

GET YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT NUMBER promptly

APPLICATIONS ARE BEING DISTRIBUTED AT ALL WORK PLACES

Your monthly Social Security check

WHO IS ELIGIBLE - - EVERYBODY WORKING FOR SALARY OR WAGES (WITH ONLY A FEW EXCEPTIONS, SUCH AS AGRICULTURE, DOMESTIC SERVICE, AND GOVERNMENT WORK). APPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNTS ARE AVAILABLE THROUGH EMPLOYERS. IF YOU DO NOT GET ONE FROM YOUR EMPLOYER, ASK FOR ONE AT THE POST OFFICE.

HOW TO RETURN APPLICATION

1. HAND IT OVER TO YOUR EMPLOYER - or	4. DELIVER IT TO LOCAL POST OFFICE - or
2. HAND IT TO ANY LABOR ORGANIZATION FROM WHICH YOU ARE A MEMBER - or	5. MAIL IT IN A SEALED ENVELOPE
3. HAND IT TO YOUR UNION CARRIER - or	6. IF HOME, THE POSTAGE OFFICE

- Social Security Board

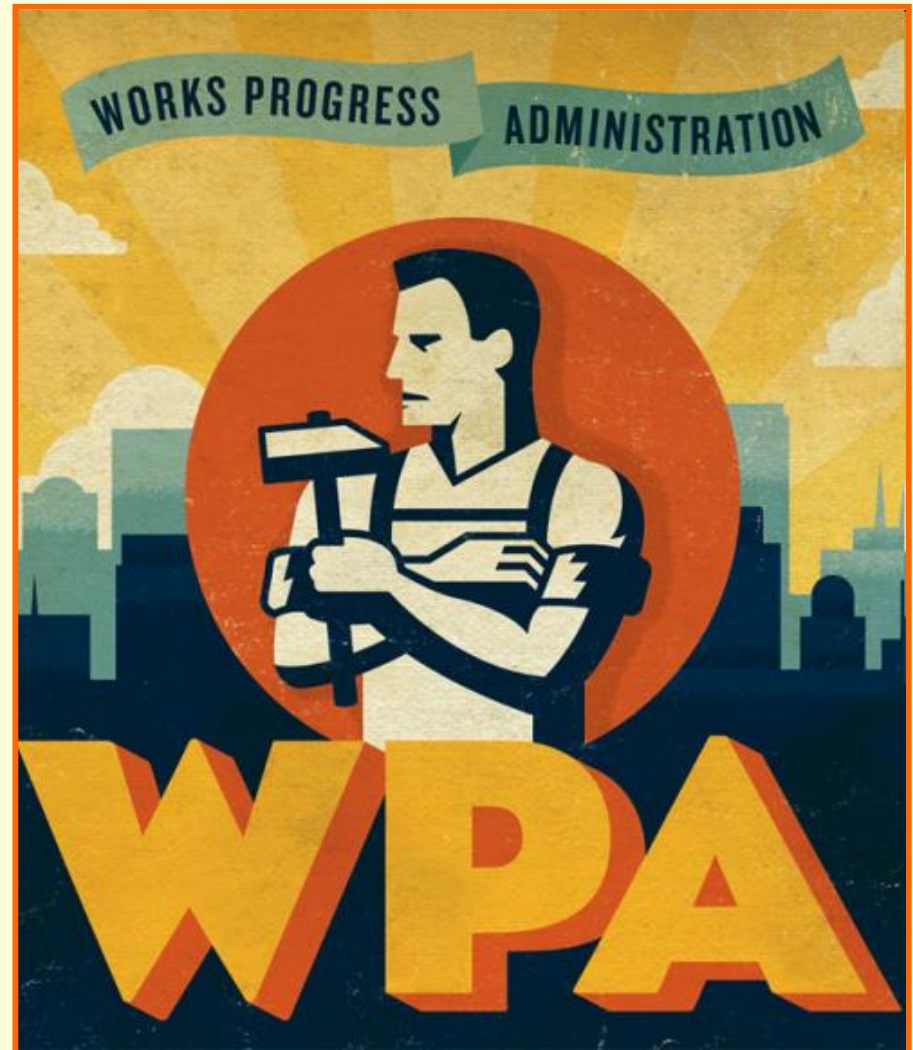
INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED AT ANY POST OFFICE

The Social Security Act provided retirement and old-age benefits financed by payroll taxes.

It also provided financial aid to orphans, the blind, and widows with small children, and a state-based unemployment assistance program.

Thousands of jobs for unemployed Oklahomans were provided by the Works Progress Administration.

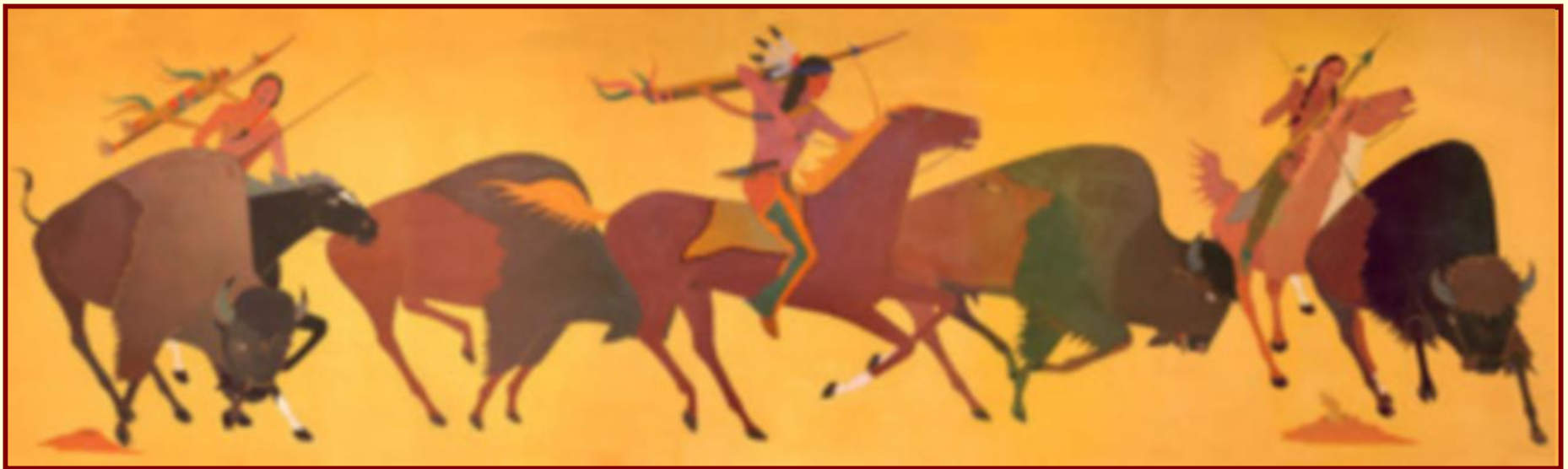
Projects included the building of elementary and high schools, stadiums, armories, museums, city halls, dams, libraries, and post offices.



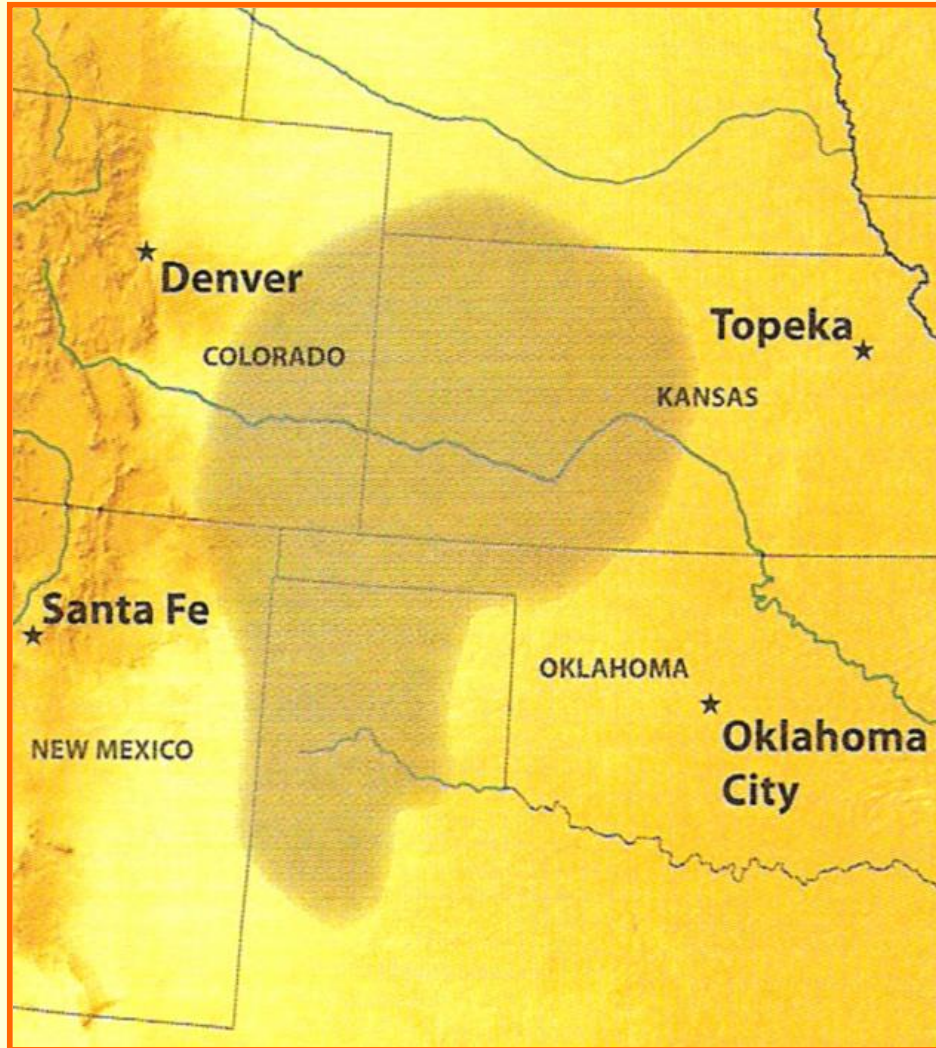
The Treasury Department commissioned Native artists to paint murals in public buildings like post offices.

A group of young Kiowa painters became well-known for their depictions of Indian life.

Pictured below is Stephen Mopope's "Buffalo Hunting," located in the U.S. Post Office in Anadarko.



Oklahoma's weather runs in cycles, from periods of wet years to periods of dry years.



**In 1932, the
Great Plains suffered
a severe drought
called The Dust Bowl.**

*The hardest hit region included
Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico,
Texas, and Oklahoma.*

*Farmers had removed the native prairie grasses and replaced them with crops.
During The Great War, they had planted fence-to-fence.*

**When the drought came, unrelenting winds
removed the fragile topsoil.**



On April 14, 1935, the “Black Sunday” dust storm buried everything in its path: cars, houses, and people.



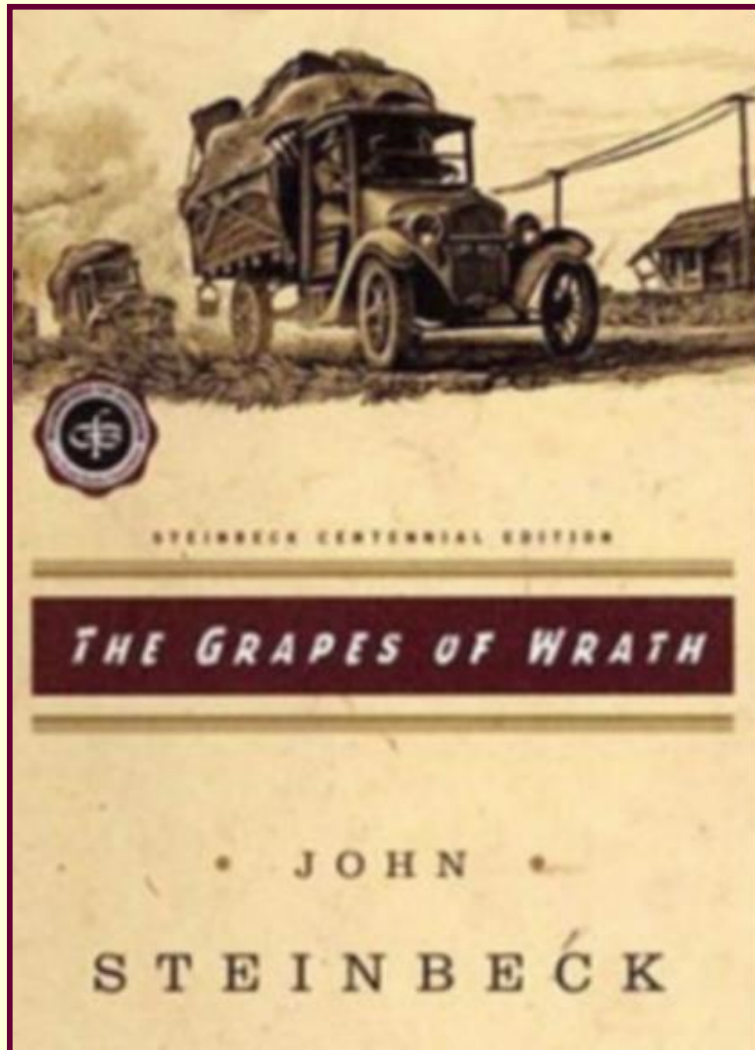
*Accustomed to
hard work and
tough times, many
Oklahoma farmers
stayed with their land.*

*Others grew tired
of the relentless dust
and left their homes
in search of
better conditions.*

*Between 1936 and 1940,
more than 300,000 people
left Oklahoma for California.*



John Steinbeck's novel "The Grapes of Wrath" told the story of a displaced Oklahoma family.



**Sadly, when they
reached California,
conditions there
were no better.**

*The title of the book comes from the Bible,
and relates to how oppressed people will
rise up to bring change.*

*Many Oklahomans don't like the book
due to its negative characterizations.*

**Singer-songwriter
Woody Guthrie wrote
passionately about
his life experiences.**

*He was born in the
oil boomtown of
Okemah in 1912.*

**One of his most
popular songs was
“This Land is
Your Land.”**



Oilman E.W. Marland became governor in 1934.

He argued for conservation and aid programs, but the state Legislature opposed them.

He succeeded in creating the Highway Patrol.





Leon "Red" Phillips was elected governor in 1938.

His primary goal was to get the state out of debt.

He passed a balanced budget amendment and another allowing women to run for any state office.

During his term as governor, he opposed the New Deal as federal interference in state matters.

He was also put on trial twice for accepting a bribe. He was acquitted both times.

In 1935, Oklahoma lost two of its favorite sons.

On a trip to Alaska, Will Rogers and Wiley Post were killed when their plane crashed into the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean off Point Barrow.

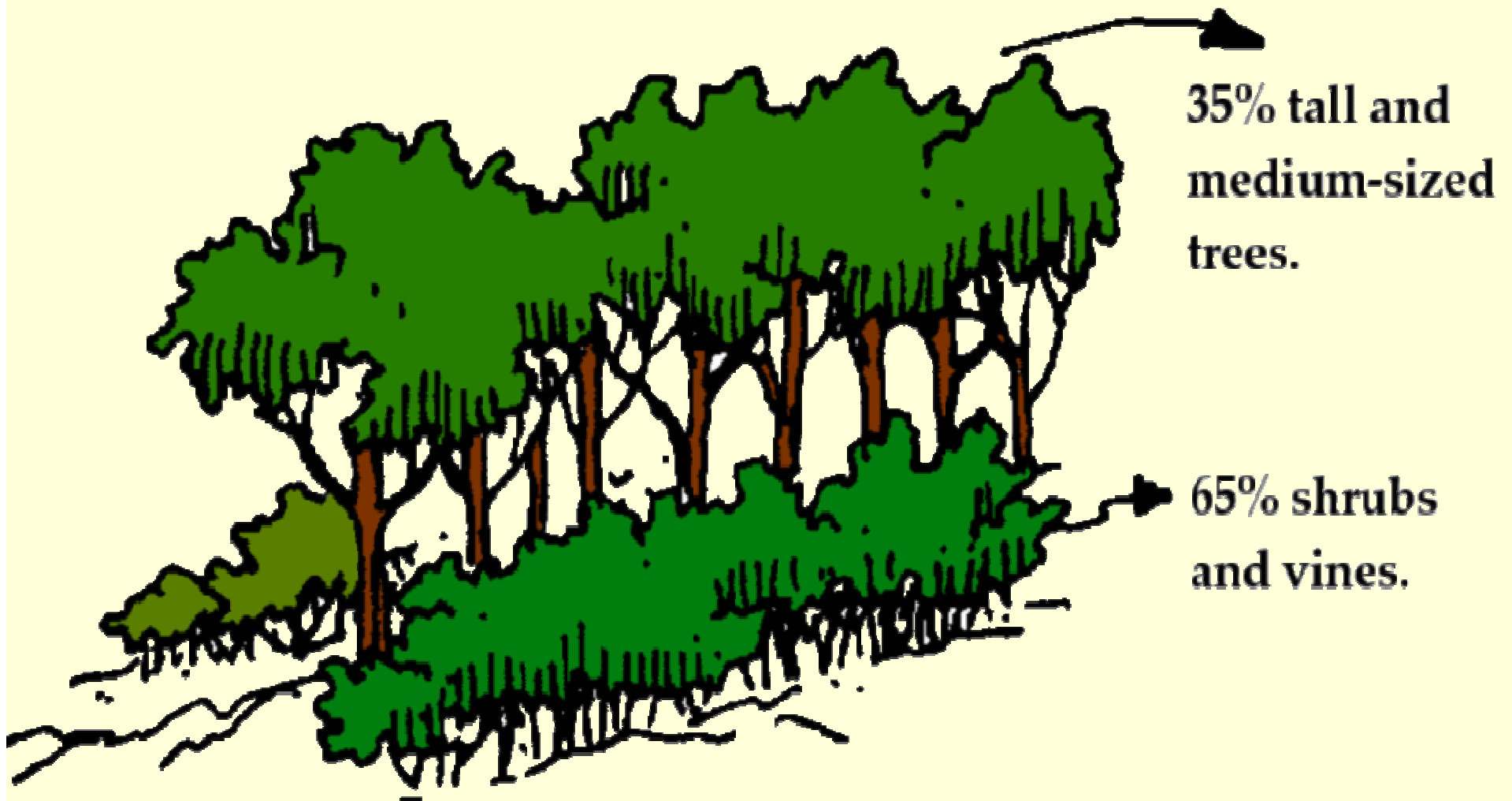


By the late 1930s, Oklahomans were beginning to use land conservation techniques.

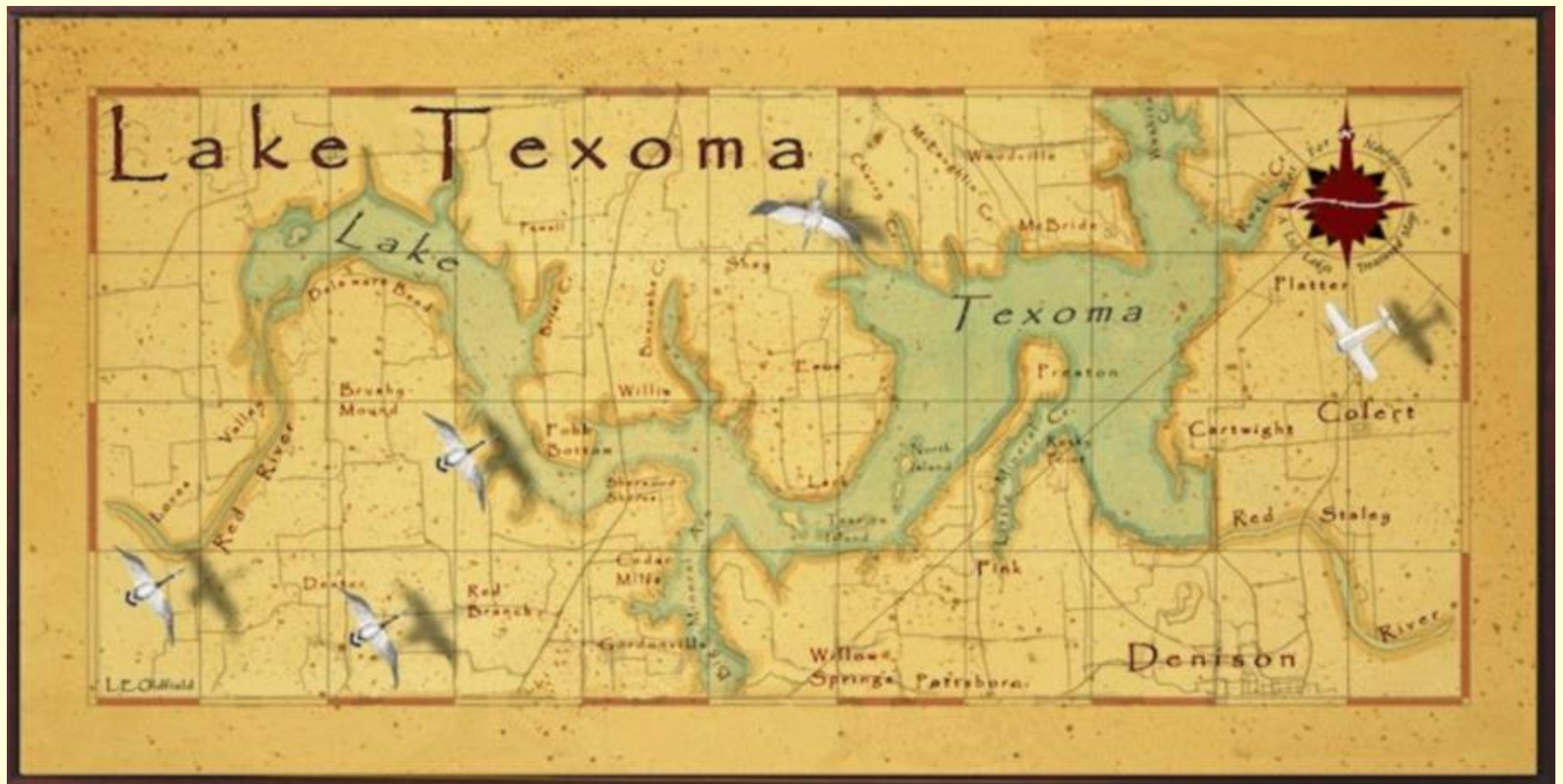


Farmers planted shelterbelts, or rows of trees and shrubs to anchor the soil and slow down the wind.

In 1939, the CCC planted the first shelterbelt in the U.S. north of Mangum.



The Denison Dam on the Red River was designed for hydroelectric generation and flood control. It also created Texoma, our second largest lake.



Oklahoma inventions from the 1930s include:
Bob Dunn's Steel Guitar



Sylvan Goldman's Shopping Cart
Carl Magee's Parking Meter



Poverty and unemployment contributed to a crime wave that spread across Oklahoma.

Notorious criminals included:

- *Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker: bank robbery, murder.*
- *Charles “Pretty Boy” Floyd: bank robbery.*
- *The Ma Barker Gang: bank robbery, kidnapping, murder.*
- *George “Machine Gun” Kelly: kidnapping, bootlegging, armed robbery.*





**Jazz music was
born in New Orleans,
but it grew up in
Oklahoma City.**

**Charlie Christian took
the guitar out of the
rhythm section and
made it the lead.**

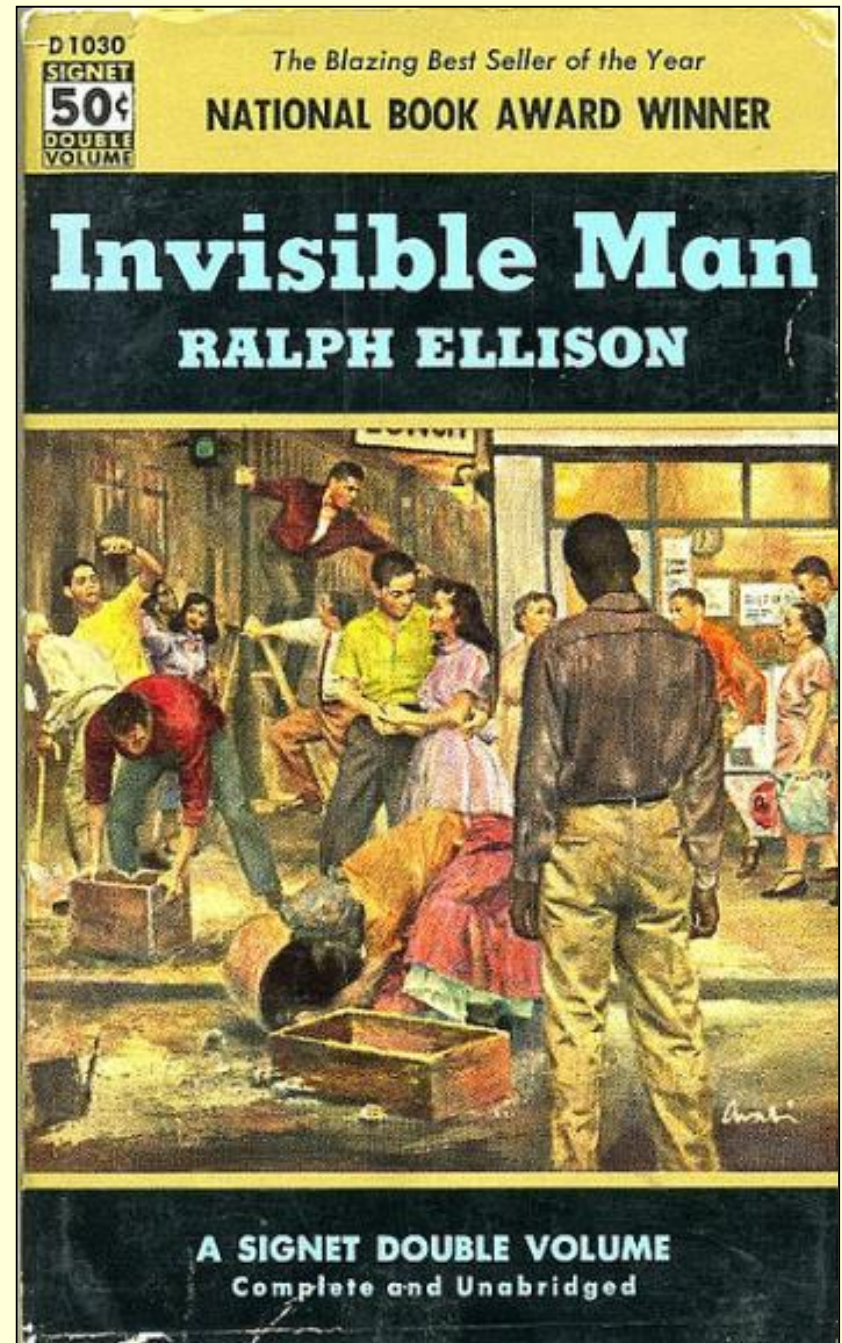
*Christian died in 1942, but was
inducted into the Rock and Roll
Hall of Fame in 1990.*

**Novelist Ralph Ellison
grew up in
Oklahoma City.**

He later moved to New York City.

**In 1953, his book
“Invisible Man”
won the
National Book Award.**

*The novel tells the story of a gifted
African American writer
who can't get published
simply because he is black.*



Oklahoma was also home to The Five Ballerinas, world-famous Native American dancers.

*They included sisters Maria and Marjorie Tallchief,
Rosella Hightower, Moscelyne Larkin, and Yvonne Chouteau.*



As the 1930s ended, events unfolded that put to rest the idea of "The War to End All Wars."

