

Land Runs, Lotteries, & Homesteading in Oklahoma

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Dugout Soddy on the Prairie by Wayne Cooper

(original color painting at Oklahoma State Capitol)

(image from Oklahoma Arts Council website: www.arts.ok.gov)

A Little History

As a result of the Civil War loyalties of certain tribes, the Indian reservations were established by the treaties of 1866. Many acres of land were taken away from the tribal nations and either re-assigned to other tribes or kept by the federal government. In 1870, civil engineers were employed by the United States to make the first land survey in the Chickasaw Nation and Western Oklahoma. The push for land to be taken by non-Indians was fought for many years.

The first parcel of land to be settled by non-Indians was the Unassigned Lands, a region in the central part of the Indian Territory laying between the Indian Meridian and the 98th Meridian and extending from the Cherokee Outlet to the Canadian River. Although this region had been ceded to the United States by the Creeks and Seminoles, they were not paid for nearly 25 years. During this time, settlers could not rightfully enter and establish homes. In March, 1889, the Seminoles and Creeks were finally paid \$1.25 an acre for these lands and at noon on April 22nd the first land run took place. People filed for land under the Homestead Act of 1862.

Other parts of the state were parceled by other runs, by lottery, or by bid. Other runs were:

September 22, 1891, the Iowa, the Sac & Fox and Pottawatomie-Shawnee reservations were opened for settlement. This included Lincoln and Pottawatomie Counties and added strips of land to Logan, Oklahoma, Cleveland and Payne Counties.

April 19, 1892, the Cheyenne & Arapaho reservations were opened. This added Blaine, Dewey, Day, Roger Mills, Custer and Washita Counties. Also, large areas were added to Kingfisher and Canadian Counties.

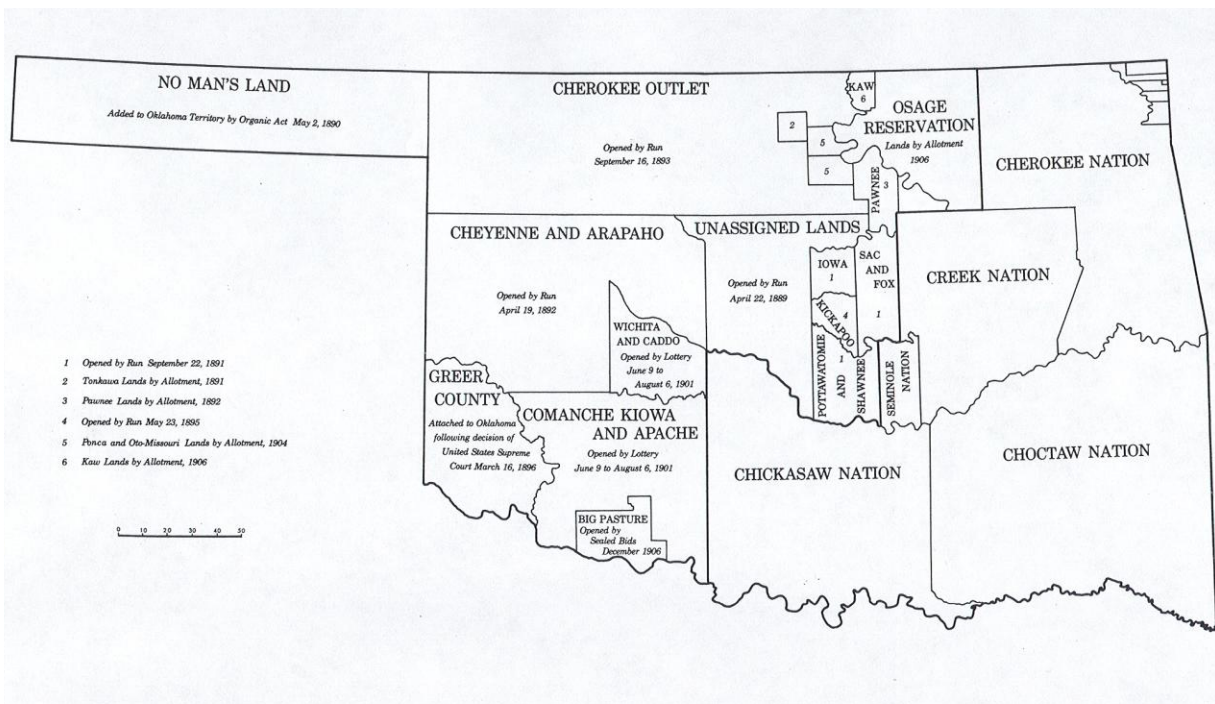
September 16, 1893, the Pawnee and the Tonkawa reservations and the Cherokee Strip were opened. These runs added 5,500,000 acres and the Counties of Kay, Grant, Woods, Woodward, Garfield, Noble and Pawnee to Oklahoma Territory.

May 25, 1895, the Kickapoo reservation was opened by run and the land was added to counties already organized in the vicinity.

In 1896, the Supreme Court had ruled Greer County lands did not belong to Texas. The Greer County Homestead Act was passed in January of 1897. The land was free except for a land office fee and was offered first to those who were already settled there. This added what is now Greer, Harman, Jackson, and part of Beckham Counties.

On August 6, 1901, the Wichita-Caddo and Comanche-Kiowa-Apache lands were opened by lottery, the last of the big land giveaways. Caddo, Kiowa, and Comanche Counties were organized from this area. From the Comanche-Kiowa-Apache reservation, a half million acres were reserved called the "Big Pasture." The Fort Sill military reservation was enlarged to fifty-six thousand acres, and a forest reserve of fifty-eight thousand acres was set aside in the Wichita Mountains.

Land Openings in Oklahoma



Land offices in Oklahoma Territory:

Guthrie - opened in 1889
 Beaver - opened in 1891
 Perry - opened in 1893
 El Reno - opened in 1901

Kingfisher - opened in 1889
 Alva - opened in 1893
 Woodward - opened in 1893
 Lawton - opened in 1901

Oklahoma City - opened in 1890
 Enid - opened in 1893
 Mangum - opened in 1897

The Organic Act - On May 2, 1890, the Organic Act was passed. Among the many provisions of this Act, the following were very important:

1. The establishment of Oklahoma Territory with legislative, executive, and judicial departments.
2. Two sections of land (numbers 16 and 36) in every township were to be reserved from settlement and used for the benefit of public schools.
3. The public lands in the panhandle were declared open to settlement and included as a part of Oklahoma Territory.
4. It provided for the organization of seven counties designated by number until a name could be chosen by vote of the people.

County Names chosen:

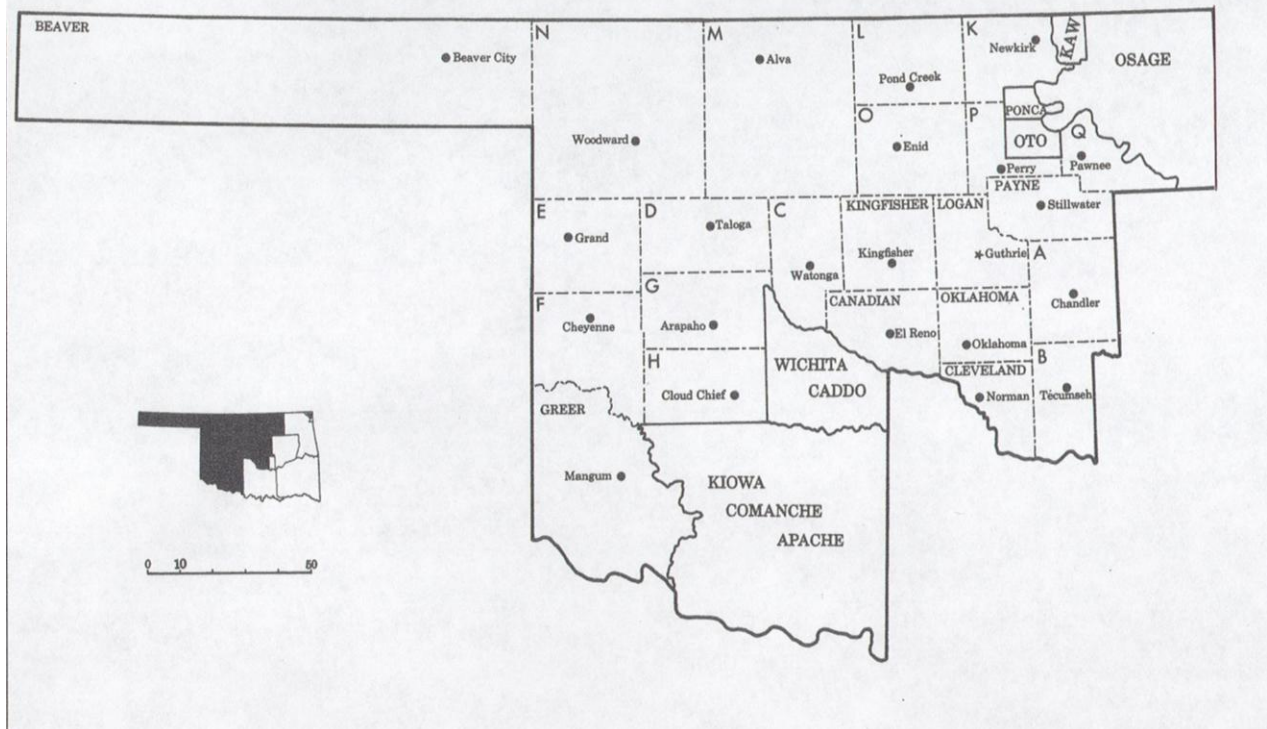
First County – Logan	Second County – Oklahoma	Third County – Cleveland
Fourth County – Canadian	Fifth County – Kingfisher	Sixth County – Payne
Seventh County - Beaver County (included Cimarron & Texas Counties)		

*Later Counties were designated by Letter until a name was chosen. These are shown on the map below.

County Names chosen:

"A County" Lincoln	"B County" Pottawatomie	"C County" Blaine
"D County" Dewey	"F County" Roger Mills	"G County" Custer
"H County" Washita	"I County" Caddo	"K County" Kay
"L County" Grant	"M County" Woods County	"N County" Woodward
"O County" Garfield	"P County" Noble	"Q County" Pawnee
"E County" Day (abolished at statehood, now part of northern Roger Mills & southern Ellis counties)		

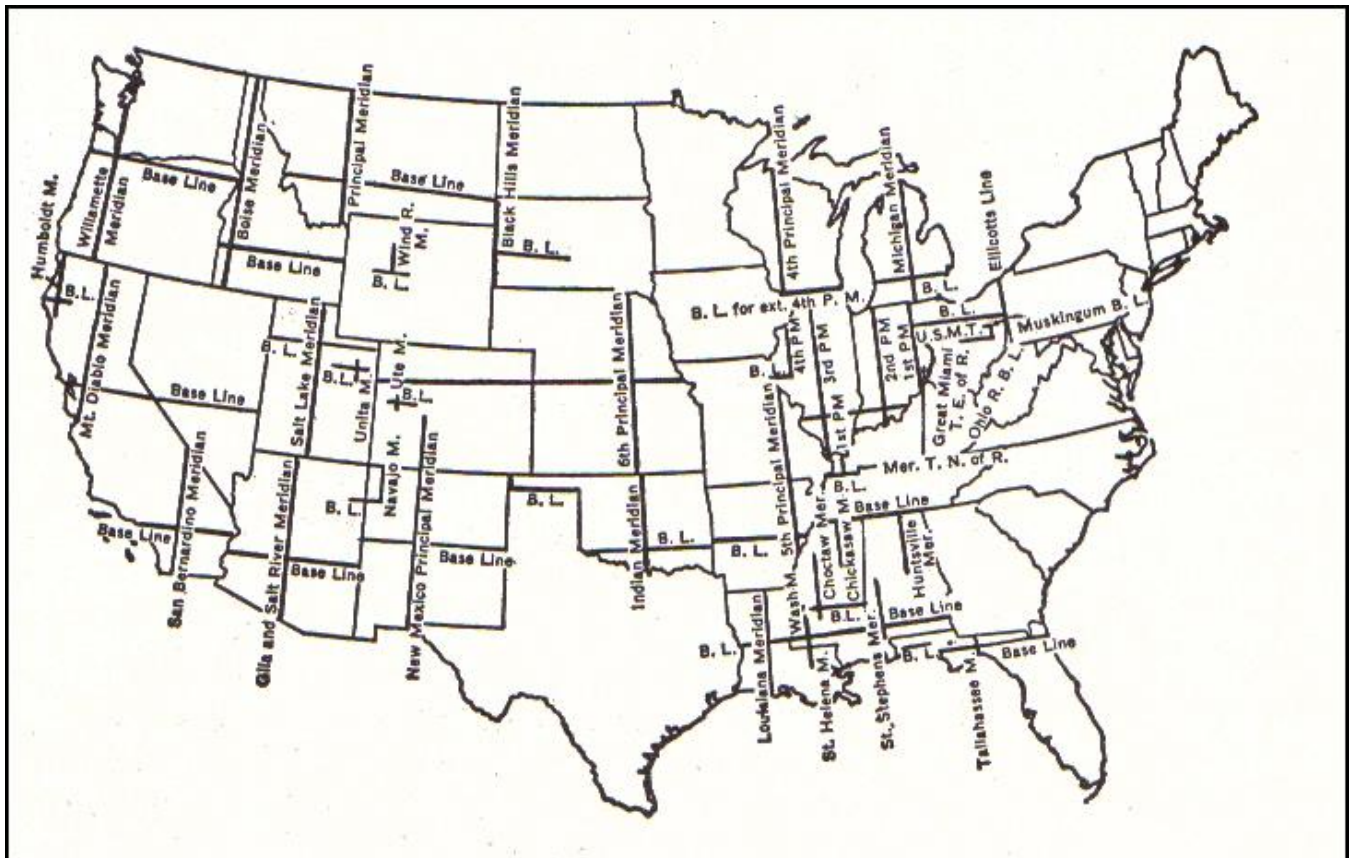
Original County Designations in Oklahoma Territory



Locating the Land

The method of surveying, subdividing, and describing land in the U.S. is called the Public Land Survey System. It was devised in 1785 and was used in 30 western and southern states. The results can be seen in the rectangular shapes of farms that look very different from the metes and bounds measurements used previously that followed streams and local landmarks. The map below shows the major meridians used to measure land.

Major US Public Meridians and Baselines

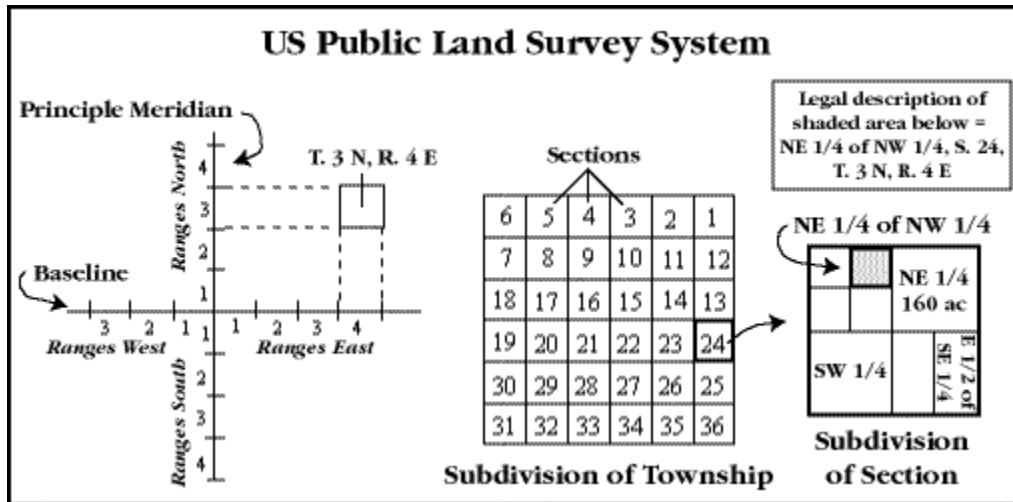


Indian Meridian

A mile south of Fort Arbuckle, a stone pillar was set as Initial Point. The line north and south through this point is the Indian Meridian; the line east and west is the base line. Every acre of land in Oklahoma, except the Panhandle, is located by its distance and direction from this point.

A township is a six-mile square piece of land. Ranges are imaginary lines running north-south, set six miles apart. A section is a piece of land one mile square containing approximately 640 acres. Standard townships contain 36 sections. Sections are numbered starting in the northeast corner. Sections are further subdivided in quarter sections to form 160 acre homesteads.

The chart on the next page shows how the townships are designated and numbered. It also shows how a legal description is written.



Tract books & Land Entry Case Files

Records were made of each land entry and filed in tract books. They serve as an index to the case files at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. They are on microfilm in the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Library. Photo copies of the tract books are at the OK Department of Libraries, 200 NE 18th Street. Land Entry Case Files contain testimonies, receipts, letters, proof of citizenship, age, and other genealogical information. These may be ordered from the National Archives, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20408-0001. Use NATF Form 84 to request copies. You will need the land description, name of the land office, final certificate or patent number as well as the name of your ancestor. These may also be ordered online. Go to the Archives website for more information at: www.archives.gov.

Other sources for information about homesteads may be found in these records:

City Directories
Land Records
Newspaper clippings
Probate records

Census Records
Marriage Records
Oral Histories
Smith's Directory

County Histories
Memorabilia
Obituaries
Tombstones