Guide to the Kerr-McGee Gallery

Guide to the Kerr-McGee Gallery

The Gallery includes Transportation, Inventions and Inventors, Military History, African-American history in Oklahoma, and Natural Resources.

Transportation

The Kerr-McGee Gallery examines all forms of transportation. No exhibit dealing with transportation would be complete without consideration of the fuels used to power transport.

Wiley Post

As you enter the gallery you see a portrait of Wiley Post, one of the most renowned aviators of all time. Born in Texas in 1898, his family moved to Garvin County when Wiley was eleven. After a brief 'hitch' in the Army, young Wiley began working in the oil field. While in the oil field he lost his left eye in an accident. Wiley used the $1800 settlement from the oil company to buy his first plane.

Post became the personal pilot of F. C. Hall, a wealthy Oklahoma oilman. Hall purchased a Lockheed Vega, largely for Post's use, and nicknamed it *Winnie Mae* after his daughter. The Vega was the fastest airplane of its type in 1930. Wiley first achieved national prominence in 1930 when he won the National Air Race Derby flying from Los Angeles to Chicago. In 1931, Post and his navigator, Harold Gatty, became the first to fly around the world. Their adventure began on June 23 and featured 14 stops along the nine day journey. In 1933 he repeated the trip solo, beating his own record. He relied on a newly devised auto-pilot and a radio compass for navigation and beat the previous record by twenty-one hours.

In 1934 Post took on the challenge of high altitude flight. He devised the pressurized flight suit making high altitude flight possible. In order to fly at high altitudes, Post super-charged the *Winnie Mae's* engine. On September 5, he reached an altitude of forty thousand feet. He would later reach fifty thousand feet, discovering the jet stream in the process. In March of 1935 he flew from Burbank, California, to Cleveland, Ohio, in the stratosphere using the jet stream to speed his flight. The flight had an average ground speed of 279 miles per hour in a plane designed for a maximum airspeed of 179 miles per hour.

The *Winnie Mae*

An exact model of the *Winnie Mae* hangs in the rotunda. The plane is a Lockheed Vega 5-C powered by a Wasp engine. The *Winnie Mae* has a cruising range of 725 miles. The price at the factory in 1928 was $18,500. Wiley Post's widow sold the original to the Smithsonian Institution, where it has been on display since 1936.

The diversity of transportation, from cars and railroads to airplanes and riverboats, is an indication of the importance transportation plays in our everyday lives. The horse served as the motive of power for thousands of years across the world; however, it was only recently reintroduced into North America. For Native Americans, travel by foot and water along the path of least resistance provided the only means for transportation.

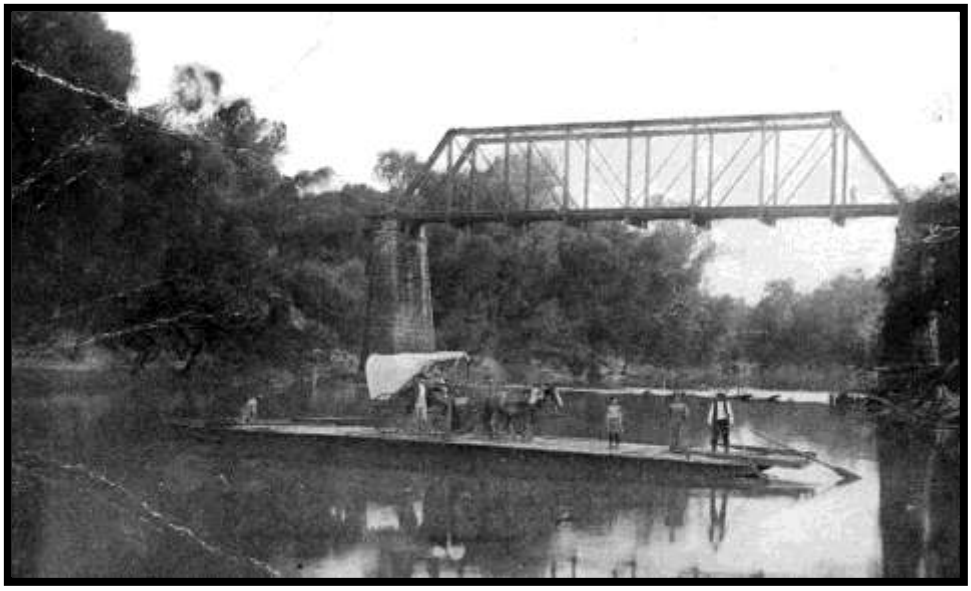
During the last century, Oklahomans witnessed a revolution in transportation times, available destinations, and increased comfort along their journey. The time it took for an individual to travel across Oklahoma went from months to hours.

Dugout Canoe

Indians used various types of canoes for transport. A dugout was constructed from a single tree of uniform diameter. The tree was stripped of bark and the bow and stern were carved with an ax. The interior of the canoe was first burned out before it was finished with additional carving. Note the displays of flatboats and keelboats above the canoe.

Water Traffic

Oklahoma's river systems have long provided the means of transport for resources and people. From early canoes to commercial watercraft today, water connects this area and the oceans beyond, allowing trade and cultural contact.

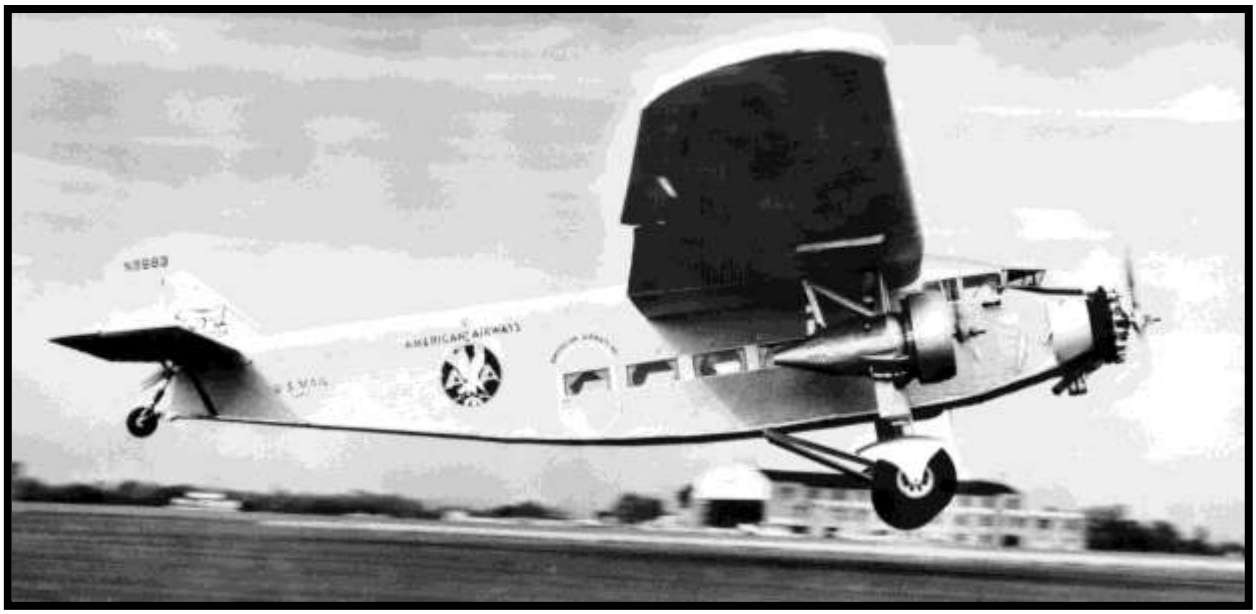


Paddlewheels to Steel Wheels

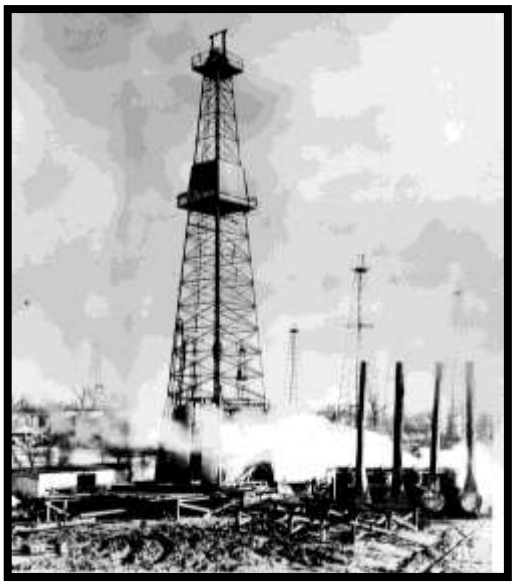
The Missouri, Kansas, & Texas, known as the KATY, laid the first track in Indian Territory on June 6, 1870. Soon rail lines spread across the vast expanses of the territory linking Oklahoma to the nation's rail system. Towns sprang to life along the railroads, providing fuel and water stops for the engines. By 1922 more than 6,500 miles of track covered the state.

Aviation

As a result of central location, large geographic area, good flying weather, and the oil industry, Oklahomans became ardent aviation users. Starting with the first aircraft assembly plant in Dewey, Oklahoma, private and corporate aviation continues to grow.

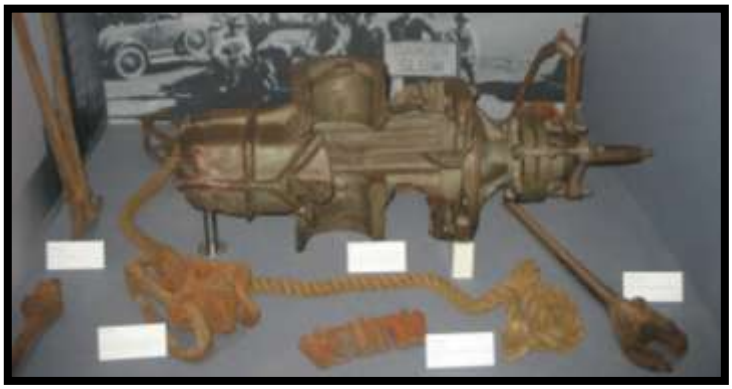


Oil Drilling & Production



Early oil wells were drilled using a cable tool. A cable tool is basically a heavy pointed weight suspended by a wire cable from a drilling derrick. The cable tool is repeatedly dropped, eventually breaking through rock at the bottom of the well. Workers would hoist the bit from the shaft and drop baler to remove rock fragments with water. This is a slow and laborious way of drilling and was rarely used for wells exceeding 1500 ft.

Rotary drilling replaced cable drilling. A drill bit connected to a motor at the surface by a long string of drilling pipes extends as deep as 24,000 feet. The exhibit shows examples of both drilling methods.



In the center of the exhibit stands a Christmas tree. The tree consists of valves to control flow from various portions of the formation that are accessed through concentric pipes suspended below the tree down the well shaft.

The Mary Sudik #1 was an early discovery well near Oklahoma City that literally "blew." Rupturing, the gusher continued to spew oil for ten days before the well could be capped. Wind carried droplets as far south as Norman. This well and others drilled on the Sudik property made the family millionaires overnight.

Standard Oil Truck

Pause by the Standard Oil truck. Horse-drawn trucks like this were used to deliver petroleum products such as kerosene, fuel oil, and lubricating oil before gasoline-powered trucks were available. On the wall behind the truck is a map showing mineral resources across the state.

On the wall across from the truck is an exhibit dealing with land transportation, illustrating the transition from transportation by horse to horse-drawn carriage and finally to automobiles.

Business

The next section of the gallery traces the development of industry in Oklahoma. You will visit exhibits on Oklahoma inventions such as the Ditch Witch and the parking meter. You will also learn about the development of air transportation as a business. Separate exhibits consider the development of banking and retail sales.

Lee Way Motor Freight

Turn your attention to the 1932 International truck that is on display. This truck was operated by Lee Way Motor Freight Company. The company, which began as a horse and wagon operation at the turn of the 20th, century transformed into one of the largest motor freight companies in the nation.

Fast Food in Oklahoma

On the opposite wall there is a panel that outlines the development of three fast food restaurant chains in the state: Bishop's Drive In, Sonic, and Beverly's Fried Chicken

Ditch Witch

In the center of the exhibit area is an early model Ditch Witch mechanical trencher. Carl Malzahn moved to Perry, Oklahoma, in 1902 and opened a blacksmith shop with his sons, Charlie and Gus. During the oil boom the shop came to be known as Charlie's Machine Shop. Charlie's son, Ed, graduated from college with a degree in engineering. Ed had an idea for a mechanical trencher that would put an end to the pick and shovel era. He perfected the idea in 1949, calling the device the Ditch Witch. Charlie's Machine Shop became Charlie's Machine Works, Inc. The Ditch Witch line has expanded to include horizontal drilling equipment and other devices.

Military History

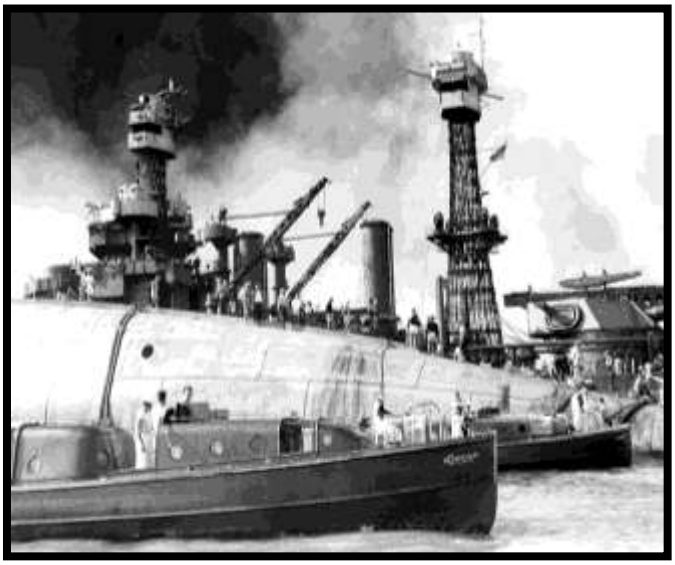
Long before Europeans ever came to what is now Oklahoma, Indian nations battled one another across this land. Oklahomans have been involved in every major conflict this country has undertaken, beginning with the American Civil War. This exhibit considers all of these encounters.

Battle of Honey Springs

Have a seat in the Honey Springs mini-theater. Perhaps the most significant battle fought in Oklahoma during the Civil War was the Battle of Honey Springs. There is a video program describing the battle. Other portions of the exhibit examine soldiers, the home front, and medical care.

The USS Oklahoma

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, the battleship USS Oklahoma anchored along battleship row in Pearl Harbor. Within minutes three separate torpedoes tore through the ship, causing her to sink.



From the Spanish American War through Vietnam and beyond, Oklahoma's sons have maintained a sense of duty and actively participated in every conflict. During World War II Oklahomans contributed in mobilization, victory gardens, military bases, and prisoner of war camps.

African-American History

African-American slaves owned by both the whites and Indians were emancipated during the Civil War. Law enforcement was all but non-existent in many parts of the Oklahoma Territories. Lynch mobs sprang up to mete out justice to those accused of a wide variety of crimes. African-Americans were frequently targeted by these mobs. This exhibit traces African-American history in Oklahoma from the end of the Civil War to the present day.

Lynchings in Oklahoma

Lynching actually refers to all forms of execution by a mob without the benefit of a trial. A variety of means were used, including hanging and shooting. Some lynch mobs even resorted to soaking a victim in oil and setting them afire. Anyone accused of horse theft, cattle rustling, murder, rape, or assault could be subjected to lynching. Whites, Indians, and African-Americans were all subject to the justice of the lynch mob. However, African-Americans, who accounted for only 10% of the population in Oklahoma, represented one-third of the lynching victims in the period 1880-1900. During this period there were over 1,000 recorded lynchings across the south and southwest; 121 of these took place in Oklahoma.

Lynchings were viewed by many as recreational events. Entire communities would rally to form a lynch mob, and that included children as well. There was the excitement of the chase, the 'victory' of the capture, and the spectacle of the execution. Lynchings and lynch mobs were frequently captured on film, with many of the more graphic pictures being made into postcards. Although documented in photographs, few lynchings ever resulted in charges being brought against the instigators.

1921 Tulsa Race Riot

In the major cities, African-Americans lived in segregated neighborhoods. The Greenwood neighborhood in Tulsa was such a neighborhood. It also served as the African-American financial center.

On Monday, May 30, Dick Rowland, a nineteen-year-old shoeshine boy was on his way to the black-only restroom on the top floor of the Drexel Building. He tripped walking into the elevator and grabbed the arm of Sarah Page, the elevator operator, to keep from falling. She was surprised and let out a scream. This startled Dick, and he ran out of the building.

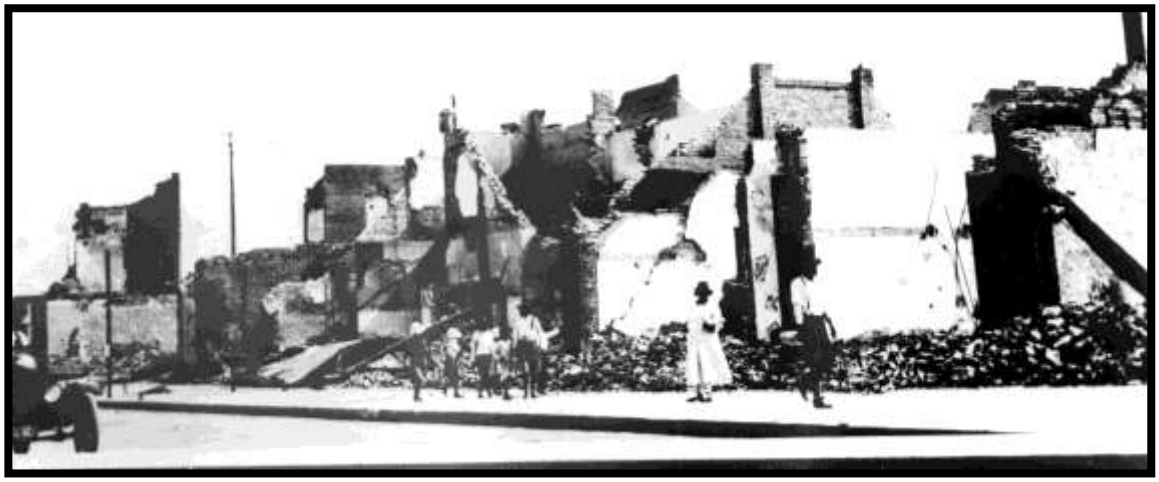
A clothing store clerk heard the scream and saw Dick run out of the building. She called police, who, in turn questioned Sarah. The police concluded that Dick's actions were accidental, not an assault. Meanwhile, Dick sought refuge in his mother's house in the Greenwood district overnight.

On Tuesday, police located Rowland and took him into protective custody in the Tulsa County Courthouse. The *Tulsa Tribune* heard about the arrest. The headline of the afternoon edition read, "Police Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator." Crowds of African-Americans gathered at the Courthouse to assist the sheriff's deputies. This only served to attract even larger crowds of whites.

As afternoon turned into evening, the crowds armed themselves. A contingent of armed African-American World War I veterans gathered at the Courthouse to defend Rowland.

Around 10 p.m. a white man confronted one of the veterans. A scuffle took place, and a gun went off. The fight soon moved into the Greenwood neighborhood. By the time the National Guard arrived at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, thirty-five blocks of the Greenwood neighborhood had been destroyed. There were thirty-nine confirmed dead (twenty-six African-American, thirteen white); Eight hundred were injured. Later reports put the number killed as high as three hundred.

Nobody was ever charged with an offense associated with the riot. Dick Rowland was released from custody in September without being charged.



Katz Drugstore Lunch Counter

Shortly after statehood, Oklahoma passed Jim Crow laws that segregated whites and African-Americans. There were to be separate entrances, separate sitting areas, separate bathrooms, and so on. In 1957, Clara Luper took a group of her high school history students with her on a trip to New York City to present a play she had written about Dr. Martin Luther King. They could stay at the same hotel as whites, eat in the same restaurants, and were generally treated like anyone else. On her return trip, Luper vowed to fight Jim Crow laws in Oklahoma. On August 19, 1958, she and twelve of her NAACP Youth Council Members (age six to seventeen) entered the Katz Drugstore in Oklahoma City and took seats at the lunch counter and ordered Cokes. White customers mocked them. They were never served, but they were not arrested, either. Katz eventually desegregated its thirty-eight drugstores.

Courthouse

Across from the drugstore is a model of a courthouse. An interactive video provides highlights from six of the major civil rights decisions handed down by U.S. courts in the past sixty years.

Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma (1948) – Ada Sipuel was initially denied entry to the University of Oklahoma (OU) Law School. Upon threat of legal action, the school finally set up a separate program for her, but continued to deny her free access to school facilities and other students. She sued, and the case finally made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court found that separate-but-equal was not a legal approach to education. Ada Sipuel became the first African-American to graduate from OU Law School.

McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (1950) – George McLaurin was forced to study and eat separate from white students. He sued the Regents, and the case found its way to the Supreme Court where Chief Justice Fred Vinson ruled that separate-but-equal treatment was illegal under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Barbershop

Beyond the fountains is a model barbershop with equipment typical of the late 1800s. The barbershop was a place to gather and discuss local news. Look at the notebook with pictures and biographies of well-known barbers.

Businesses

A number of African-Americans established successful businesses. There is an exhibit across from the barbershop that highlights some of the products offered. Note the old film projector from the Jewel Theater.

African-American Music

African-Americans are noted for contributions in both jazz and blues, as well as many other styles of music. In Oklahoma City, the Deep Deuce was the place to go for both jazz and blues.

Model Church

The Church was the center of many African-American communities. The model church across from the music exhibit is typical of the simple church that could be found in virtually every community. Artifacts on display came from the Sweet Home Freedman Baptist Church. Look at the notebook highlighting the lives of a number of renowned ministers.

Education

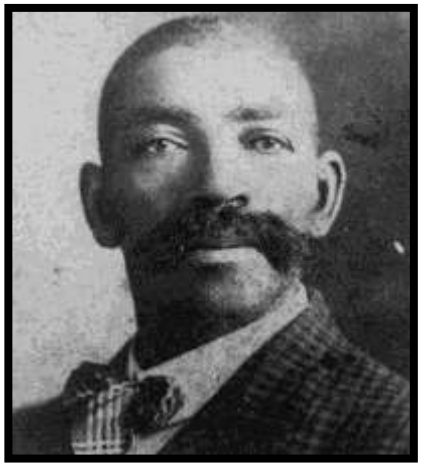
Next to the model church is an exhibit on education. Note the section on the education of African-American teachers and the section on education in Indian Territory. An audio program lets you hear the thoughts of several well-known African-American educators on such topics as separate-but-equal education.

All Black Towns

The beginning of Oklahoma's all black towns can be traced back to the years just after the Civil War. Former slaves from the Five Civilized Tribes often settled together for protection and sense of community. This tradition carried on well into the 20th century. From the mid 18th century through the 1920s African-Americans settled more than 50 identifiable towns and communities.

Laying Claim

Freedmen participated in all of the various land runs. In addition, large numbers of black families from harsh racial and economic conditions fled the south in search of a new beginning.

Lawmen

African-American peace officers were rare in the west except for in Indian Territory. The Justice Department decided that African-American lawmen would gain respect in Indian Territory because they were not white lawmen. One of the first to test this theory was Bass Reeves. He served in law enforcement for more than 35 years. Over 50 African-Americans were commissioned as U.S. Deputy Marshals.