

Opening Remarks to the Texas Map Society
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Thank you, Dean Johnson, for that kind introduction. On behalf of the Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Agricultural & Mechanical Colleges, I welcome you to the campus of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. As an avid collector of antique maps – I collect two kinds of maps: pre-1700 world maps and, unsurprisingly, Oklahoma maps –I was excited to learn that the Texas Map Society would hold this meeting at OSU.

I believe the work of those who study and preserve maps is vital. Maps are an illustration of our history. They tell us much about who we are, how we got here, and where we are headed. Many maps are beautiful works of art, as well.

First, let me say a word about Oklahoma State University, which I believe is a perfect place for this meeting. Oklahoma

State University is a land grant institution. Founded in 1890, OSU proudly embraces its land grant mission as the people's university. OSU's mission statement makes this clear: Our job is to "improve the lives of people in Oklahoma, the nation, and the world through integrated, high-quality teaching, research, and outreach...."

I strongly believe the work of the OSU Library, the Map Room and the "Paper to Digital" project are vital parts of our land grant mission. By engaging in these activities, we both preserve our history and make it readily available, as the missions statement says, to the "people of Oklahoma, the nation, and the world." This is the very essence what a land grant institution is supposed to do. To be sure, the land grant colleges have always emphasized the agricultural and mechanical arts. Yet, according to the Morrill Act itself, they were to do so "without excluding other scientific *and classical studies* ... to

promote the liberal and practical education” of the people. The study and preservation of maps touch all parts of the land grant mission.

Of course, the histories of Oklahoma and Texas are significantly intertwined. And I say that despite the words of an early and somewhat disreputable former Oklahoma Governor, Alfalfa Bill Murray, who, when asked to what he attributed his great success in Oklahoma politics, quipped, “Never said anything good about Texas.” To those interested in Oklahoma and Texas cartography, perhaps the most obvious point of intersection is old Greer County, the southwestern corner of Oklahoma, which today comprises Greer County, Jackson County and part of Beckham County.

Let me take you back 123 years, two weeks and two days in history. On May 2, 1890, Congress statutorily directed the Attorney General of the United States to institute suit against

Texas to determine whether old Greer County belonged to Texas or the new Oklahoma Territory.

Determination of the suit depended on the February 22, 1819, treaty between the United States and Spain, concluded, during President James Monroe's first term, by his Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams. The treaty put the border at the Red River, "as laid down in Melish's map of the United States, published at Philadelphia, improved to the first of January, 1818."

Unsurprisingly, there were many errors in Melish's map. It improperly marked the 100th parallel. And it imprecisely marked the Red River. Ultimately, whether Greer County belonged to Texas or Oklahoma depended on whether the reference in the Treaty to the Red River was to its North Fork, as Texas argued, or the South Fork.

In reaching its conclusion, the Court looked at several other

19th Century maps (all listed in the opinion). Ultimately, the Court held that “the direction in the treaty to follow the course of the Red River westward [as opposed to northwestward, as Texas argued] to the 100th meridian takes the line not up the North Fork, but westwardly with the river now known as the ‘Prairie Dog Town Fork,’ or ‘South Fork of Red River,’ until it reaches that meridian[.]”

This was no small decision. By judicial fiat, Oklahoma Territory grew by over 1.5 million acres, or over 2,300 square miles.

There are two footnotes to this story.

Footnote 1: Justice John Marshall Harlan authored the opinion in *United States v. Texas*, which was decided on March 16, 1896. Just two months later, exactly 117 years ago today, the United States Supreme Court issued another opinion, though this time Justice Harlan dissented. His dissent in that case is perhaps

the most famous dissenting opinion in the history of the Supreme Court. While his colleagues brought collective shame on the Court with the issuance of the infamous “separate but equal” decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, on May 18, 1896, Justice Harlan wisely wrote that “In respect of civil rights common to all citizens, the Constitution of the United States does not, I think, permit any public authority to know the race of those entitled to be protected in the enjoyment of such rights.”

Footnote 2: *United States v. Texas* was not the final word on Greer County. In 1929, new surveying methods were used to establish that the actual 100th parallel was slightly to the west of the one determined in 1896. On March 17, 1930, 34 years and a day after the *United States v. Texas* decision, Texas regained a strip of land along Oklahoma’s western border somewhere between 880 feet and 4,040 feet wide.

On behalf of the Board of Regents, I am thrilled OSU is

hosting this meeting of the Texas Map Society. We are proud of our campus, and I trust you are having a great time here.

Welcome to Stillwater.