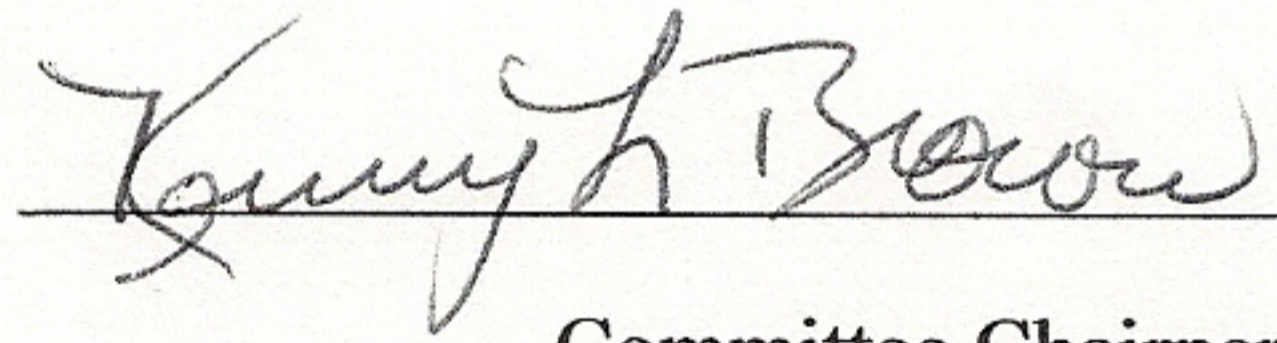


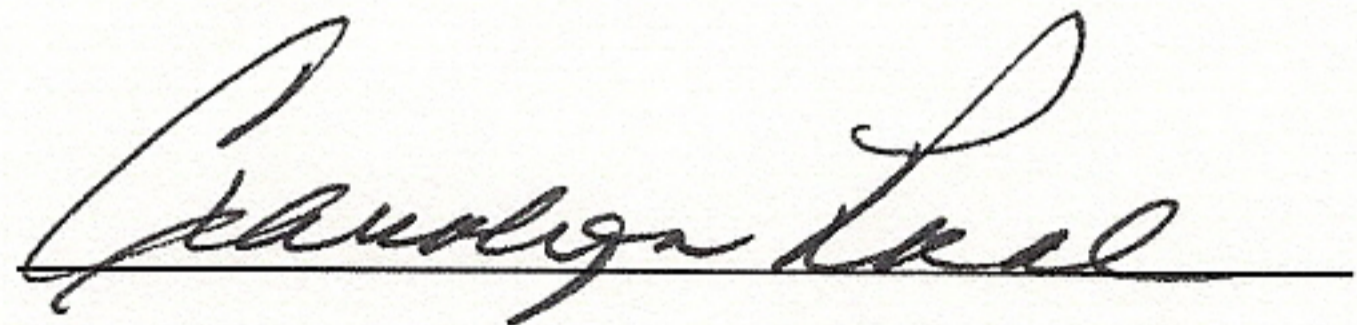
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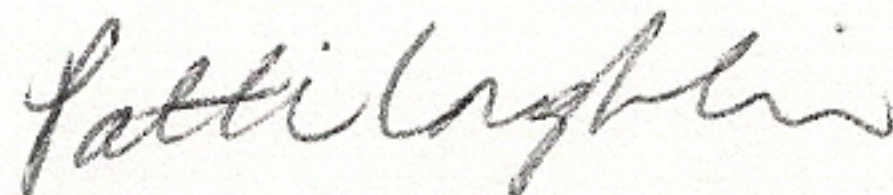
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OKLAHOMA HISTORY, POETRY AND ANTI-COMMUNISM: THE WRITINGS OF  
ZOE TILGHMAN

By

MALLORY NEWELL

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY/MUSEUM STUDIES

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## Abstract

Zoe Tilghman was one of the early women writers in Oklahoma. Throughout her career she used her own experiences and those of her husband, the famous U.S. Marshal William Tilghman, to write stories that portrayed the West as a place of excitement and adventure. Most of her works were centered around western themes such as outlaws, lawmen and Native Americans and were easily accessible to most age groups. She strived to preserve Oklahoma history through her books and articles. Over the course of her eighty-four years she published thirteen books and at least five articles, as well as holding the job of literary editor at *Harlow's Weekly* and serving as assistant director of the Oklahoma Writers' Project. She was an important part of the Oklahoma community. She founded and was a part of several organizations that sought to provide encouragement and support to writers, poets and other artists. Tilghman wrote at the same time as some of the most notable women writers in the state. Where did she fit in with other writers in not only Oklahoma, but the West as a region? Her lack of discipline and formal training barred her from the scholarly ranks of authors such as Angie Debo, Alice Marriot, and Muriel Wright, and her lack of an original voice kept her from joining fiction writers such as Willa Cather and Helen Hunt Jackson. She gained a certain amount of popularity during her lifetime, but was not able to sustain the notoriety through to the present day.

## Acknowledgments

First I would like to thank my professors in the History and Geography department for giving me all the tools that I needed to write my thesis and working with me to improve my writing and research skills. I would like to give special thanks to Dr. Brown for reading through my many drafts and without whose class I never would have discovered Zoe Tilghman. I would also like to thank my mother and brother for understanding that my second home in the library was only temporary, and my father, who acted as my sounding board and editor.

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## Chapter One: The Life and Times of Zoe Tilghman: 1880-1964

As a writer of popular historical fiction, Zoe Agnes Stratton Tilghman tended to over dramatize certain elements in her books. Her lack of formal university training was evident in her writings. Instead of presenting the facts and letting the reader decide his own opinion she stated her views openly in her writings. She lacked the finesse of the other writers of her time. She did not balk at the idea of using her husband's fame to draw an audience for her own publications. Bill is featured in many of her books including *Outlaw Days*, *Spotlight*, and *Marshal of the Last Frontier*. She devoted her life to studying, preserving and sharing Oklahoma history. Her life story is a testament to her dedication to achieving those goals. Why was Tilghman not as recognized as the other historians of her time? How much of her success came from her connections with Bill? Why was she not included in the same category as writers such as Angie Debo, Muriel Wright and Alice Marriott?

Tilghman's popularity was a combination of her marriage to Bill which gained her some recognition and the content of her books. She catered to the portion of the population that enjoyed the more fantastic elements of the West. Even though she strived for a more historical feel in some of her books she fell short; her writing lacked the discipline and academic elements that her contemporaries displayed. Another factor that kept her from entering the same category as other women historians in Oklahoma was her failure to bring a unique voice to the genre. Her books and articles were based on personal experiences and stories told to her by her husband, but did not add anything new. She is important because her contributions to the community and her work on the

Oklahoma Writers' Project set her apart from her contemporaries. She started organizations that provided encouragement and help to poets and writers throughout the state as well as supporting other forms of art. Through her stories she recorded her memories and experiences and provided entertainment for many Oklahomans.

August 1936, an article in *The Oklahoman*, titled "Mrs. Tilghman Busy Using Experience," describes Zoe Tilghman as "one of the most versatile authorities in the state on such subjects as Oklahoma history, music, art, industry, geography, and flora and fauna."<sup>1</sup> Throughout her career as a poet, storyteller, and historian, she produced numerous works that left an imprint on Oklahoma's literary history. Her accomplishments include being featured in many prestigious publications such as *The New York Times*, *The New York Sun*, and *Literary Digest*.<sup>2</sup> She was willing to give advice to writers who were just starting out. During her lifetime she promoted Oklahoma history and literary works of all kinds. Before her marriage to William Matthew Tilghman, she taught school for three years.<sup>3</sup> She returned to the education profession at many stages of her life, not only in the traditional classroom sense, but also through her books and participation in public programs and organizations. The Oklahoma Federal Writers Project and the Oklahoma Poetry Society showcased Tilghman's dedication to the encouragement of new writers and furthering the study of Oklahoma history. She enjoyed a successful career in education and promotion despite her lack of formal training and her tendency to be overly dramatic.

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<sup>1</sup> "Mrs. Tilghman Busy Using Experience," *The Oklahoman*, 9 August 1936, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Newsletter of the poetry society, folder 1, box 20, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library Special collections and university archives, University of Tulsa, Tulsa Oklahoma; Elaine Boylan and Mary Hays Marable *Handbook of Oklahoma Writers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939) 85.

<sup>3</sup> Boylan and Marable, *Handbook*, 85.

Zoe was born in Greenwood County, Kansas, in 1880. Her father, Mayo E. Stratton was rancher, and her mother, Agnes M. Stratton stayed at home.<sup>4</sup> An early settler, Mayo had driven the third herd of cattle up the Chisholm trail and became a member of the Kansas Bar Association. Her grandfather had been a senator in Maine. In 1887, the Stratton family moved to a ranch in Osage county, where they lived until 1893, leasing lands from the Osage Indians. Zoe's father was one of the only white men allowed in Powhuska at the time.<sup>5</sup> After leaving Osage, the Strattons relocated to a claim in Tonkawa, then moved to a farm in Ingalls.<sup>6</sup> In her books, she sought to produce images of the state that were as accurate as possible drawing on her own knowledge and experiences, she strived to create an image of Oklahoma in the early years. Growing up on a ranch in the Cherokee Strip allowed her to become familiar with the landscape of Oklahoma. She learned the names of the local plants and animals as well as the habitats of the area's wildlife. The knowledge came in handy later when she worked on a guide to the state with the Federal Writers' Project.<sup>7</sup>

Zoe, described as being slight in stature with a square face and wide set eyes, worked on the ranch alongside her father. One of her husband's biographers said, "She rode with her father and the cowhands cutting out the calves, roping and branding them with skill."<sup>8</sup> She did not necessarily fit the profile of a typical lady; however, she fit the typical profile of a pioneer woman. Life on the ranch allowed Tilghman to learn about

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<sup>4</sup> Boylan and Marable, *Handbook*, 85; Folder labeled Zoe Tilghman, Federal Writers Project Collection, Research Center, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Hereafter known as OHC.

<sup>5</sup> "Mrs. Tilghman Busy Using Experience," *The Oklahoman*, 9 August 1936, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Boylan and Marable, *Handbook*, 85.

<sup>7</sup> "Mrs. Tilghman Busy Using Experience," *The Oklahoman*, 9 August 1936, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Floyd Miller, *Bill Tilghman: Marshal of the Last Frontier* (Garden City: Double Day and Co. Inc., 1968) 181.



horses and bloodlines, and gave her a common ground with her future husband and appeared in her writings.

The majority of her early education took place at home. Her mother taught her for grades one through three, and she completed grades four and six through nine in public schools in Arkansas City, Kansas. Later she attended the University of Oklahoma (OU). Tilghman spent one and a half years in the preparatory school. After 1897, she completed two years at OU<sup>9</sup> For the time women did not typically continue on to university, but according to Floyd “no one was really surprised when Zoe Stratton went.”<sup>10</sup> During her time at the university, she published her first poem in the school literary magazine, *Umpire Magazine*, she was the literary editor. She wrote the piece because they lacked one for their Christmas issue.<sup>11</sup> During her years at OU Tilghman worked as a teacher. In 1947, Tilghman received her Bachelor’s degree in education from Central State College in Edmond, Oklahoma, where she was a member of Phi Alpha Sigma.<sup>12</sup>

During her breaks from school, Zoe went home to Lincoln County, where she lived with her father. While Zoe was at OU, her father made the acquaintance of William “Two Gun” Bill Tilghman, the sheriff of Lincoln County and famous U.S. Marshal. Her future husband found fame as a law enforcement officer through his involvement with a triumvirate of Marshals named the “three guardsmen.” During his career, he had tracked down and helped to capture some of the most famous criminals in Oklahoma Territory. Some of his arrests included Bill Doolin and Al Jennings. Bill had been married before.

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<sup>9</sup> Boylan and Marable, *Handbook*, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, *Bill Tilghman*, 181.

<sup>11</sup> Poetry Society Bulletin, folder 6, box 3, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman Oklahoma.

<sup>12</sup> Diploma from Central State College, Folder 7, Box 8, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

His first wife Flora died a year after they separated in 1898.<sup>13</sup> Bill, as most people knew him, met Zoe during her break from school in 1901. He soon started visiting her at school, and around Christmas of 1902, he proposed to her. She accepted, and they were married on July 15, 1903, when she was twenty-three and he was forty-nine. Bill had two children from his previous marriage, Dot and Charles. Zoe did not have much to do with them. The couple honeymooned in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, where Bill had captured Bill Doolin in 1896. Bill and Zoe had three children together, Richard, Tench, and Woodrow.<sup>14</sup> Two out of their three offspring had trouble with the law. Their tragic lives are an interesting contrast to the life that their father led and the legacy he left behind.

Tench, the oldest, born in 1905 was named after George Washington's aid, who was supposed to have been an ancestor of the Tilghman family. He joined the army and reached the rank of Lt. Colonel and was stationed in Turkey and France during World War Two. When he returned, he studied law and practiced in Oklahoma City.<sup>15</sup> Richard, born in 1908, was involved in a gambling accident and died from a gunshot wound in 1929, at the age of twenty one. Not many mentions are made about him after his death. In a letter to Zoe, Fred E. Sutton, a friend of the Tilghman family, stated "No one can make me believe that they with the good mother and father they have would go deliberately into any such a thing."<sup>16</sup> Woodrow, the youngest of the Tilghman children, worked as a

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<sup>13</sup> Photocopy of "Historical Notes on Tilghman," vertical file on Tilghman family, historical research department, Museum of Pioneer History, Chandler, Oklahoma.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *Bill Tilghman*, 181-2.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Doris Tilghman to Zoe Tilghman, folder 28, box 1, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Fred E. Sutton to Zoe Tilghman, folder 23, box 1, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma; Photocopy of Newspaper Articles, Vertical File on Tilghman Family, Historical Research Department, Museum of Pioneer History, Chandler, Oklahoma.

congressional page in Washington, D.C. He was convicted of armed robbery and sent to the Oklahoma State Penitentiary.<sup>17</sup>

Zoe's experiences with Bill and her exposure to the outlaw and lawmen culture were important influences on her early writings. During her marriage, she developed a romantic image of lawmen, which she was determined to protect. In 1939, Tilghman sued a newspaper for \$100,000 because they ran an article claiming that the United States Marshals were cowards. They specifically referenced Bill in the article claiming that a witness had observed him hiding under a bed during a chase. He was involved in the capture of many notorious gangs and individuals such as the Dalton gang and Al Jennings.<sup>18</sup> The Tilghmans moved to Oklahoma City in 1911 when Bill was offered a job as the chief of police.<sup>19</sup> Zoe spent most of the remainder of her life in Oklahoma City, but always wanted to move back to Chandler. In 1924, Bill was killed by Wiley Lynn, a corrupt federal prohibition officer, while on duty in Cromwell, Oklahoma.<sup>20</sup> Bill's death acted as a catalyst to Zoe's writing career as she turned to publishing books and article to make a living. Bill left Zoe and the children with little to no means to live on. In 1935, Tilghman petitioned congress to pay damages for the death of her husband. The resolution went before Congress and passed.<sup>21</sup>

Tilghman participated in community activities. Starting in 1914, she joined and founded several clubs and groups. She was a charter member of the Oklahoma Authors' Club. In 1915 she took home the first prize in their short story contest. Tilghman was

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from Woodrow Wilson Tilghman to Zoe Tilghman, folder 5, box 2, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma; "Woody Tilghman Bound on Armed Robbery Charge," *The Oklahoman*, 8 February 1950, 4.

<sup>18</sup> "Mrs. Tilghman Sues Paper for \$100,000," *The Oklahoman*, 16 July 1939, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, *Bill Tilghman*, 195.

<sup>20</sup> "U.S. is Asked for Damages," *The Oklahoman*, 14 March 1935, 12.

<sup>21</sup> "U.S. is Asked for Damages," *The Oklahoman*, 14 March 1935, 12.

elected president of the club twice while absent because her reputation as a writer and literary personality boosted membership. She also won third prize in poetry with the Oklahoma Federation of Women's Clubs.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, she was a member of the 89'rs, comprised of individuals that participated in the land run of 1889 when Oklahoma was opened up to white settlement. She held membership individually and through marriage. In the course of her community activities, Tilghman taught poetry at the extension division of the University of Oklahoma as well as at the local Young Women's Christian Association.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, she was involved in a poetry correspondence class for the *Writing Guide* based out of St. Louis Missouri. She wrote the course and handled all of the work produced by the contributors.<sup>24</sup> After Bill's death, Zoe held a myriad of jobs including teaching and working at Tinker Air Force Base.<sup>25</sup> Her community involvement set her apart from her contemporary writers and made her an important part of Oklahoma history.

Her earliest articles were published in magazines such as *Women's Home Companion* and *Outlook*. In 1917, "Automobile Camping Trip" appeared in the women's magazine followed closely by her first Native American piece "The Wives of Walking Sun." (1919). Her first book, *The Dugout* (1925) was published by Harlow's Publishing Company in 1924. Next, Tilghman produced her first western history book, *Outlaw Days: A True History of Early-Day Oklahoma Characters* (1926). The book focuses on the more infamous gangs of Oklahoma. Her introduction to *Outlaw Days* demonstrates

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<sup>22</sup> Boylan and Marable, *Handbook*, 86

<sup>23</sup> Boylan and Marable, *Handbook*, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Poetry Society Bulletin, folder 6, box 3, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>25</sup> Photocopy of *Twin Territories*, Vertical File on Tilghman Family, Historical Research Department, Museum of Pioneer History, Chandler, Oklahoma.

Tilghman's tendency to wax lyrically about outlaw history, "Here the tragedy of crime is stripped of its glamour and the outlaw shown to be without the gallantry and dashing courage credited to him by the cheap novelist and writer of exaggerated heroics."<sup>26</sup>

In 1924, Tilghman went to work at *Harlow's Weekly*, a newspaper servicing Oklahoma City. The publication was owned by the Harlow family, who also operated Harlow's publishing company. Tilghman had a long lasting relationship with the family and their businesses. Harlow's Publishing Company produced a majority of Tilghman's books. She wrote a column titled "Among Oklahoma's Literary People." Tilghman profiled famous Oklahoma writers as well as up and coming talent. She worked her way up to become literary editor of the paper.<sup>27</sup> During her time as editor she was sent contributions from writers all over the state. She provided encouragement and gave constructive criticism to the contributors. She was dedicated to calling attention to the literary works of the state. She worked at the paper until 1935 when she was hired to be the assistant director of the Oklahoma branch of the Federal Writers' Project.

Tilghman's first love in the literary world was poetry. She wrote poems throughout all the phases of her life. After she released her anthology, *Prairie Winds*, in 1930 she continued to write. In 1934, one year before being appointed as assistant director of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), she put out a call to the poets of Oklahoma with the goal of organizing a society. She held the position of president for the first five years of the group's existence.<sup>28</sup> In order to encourage new writers as well as the existing members, the organization held an annual contest looking for the best poets in

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<sup>26</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, iii.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Henry T. Chambers to Zoe c/o Harlow's Weekly, folder 3, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>28</sup> Poetry Society bulletin, folder 6, box 3, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman Oklahoma.

the state.<sup>29</sup> Later, in the life of the society, the contest was extended to include universities and high schools. In the fifties a junior unit was added.<sup>30</sup> The group was a testament to Tilghman's dedication to promoting Oklahoma literary works. She worked hard to make the organization a success as well as encouraging new poets, admitting anyone who had an interest in poetry. The goal of the group was "promotion of interest and the recognition of Oklahoma writers."<sup>31</sup> In the first year of the society's existence, membership reached over one hundred writers.<sup>32</sup> The only qualifications for membership were an interest in poetry, and a willingness to work with the society.<sup>33</sup> The society still exists today.<sup>34</sup> The poetry society was a big achievement for Tilghman. Through the group she left an imprint on Oklahoma's literary history and preserved a part of her legacy.

In 1936, the poetry society produced an anthology that highlighted the talent of the members. The compilation of poems included Tilghman's own work as well as that of other seasoned poets such as William Cunningham, future director of the Federal Writers' Project, and new, upcoming poets.<sup>35</sup> The book was purchased by schools and libraries all over Oklahoma. Throughout her career, Tilghman worked to educate the children of Oklahoma about the literary world and the history of the state. As a part of her work with the society, she lectured about local writers to draw attention to Oklahoma

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<sup>29</sup> "Contest is Opened By Poetry Society," *The Oklahoman*, 3 October 1935, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Poetry Society bulletin, folder 6, box 3, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>31</sup> "Mrs. Tilghman Re-Elected President; Place on Board Given to Mrs. Stealy," *The Oklahoman*, 24 February 1935, 48.

<sup>32</sup> "Mrs. Tilghman Re-Elected President; Place on Board Given to Mrs. Stealy," *The Oklahoman*, 24 February 1935, 48.

<sup>33</sup> Poetry Society Bulletin, June 1956, folder 20, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection McFarlin Library.

<sup>34</sup> Chris Jones, "Love of Words Finds Expression in Poetry Society," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 3, 2007. <http://www.newsok.com/article/9060930> (accessed April 5, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth C. Kaufman, "The Way I See It," *The Oklahoman*, 1 March 1936, 51.

literary works.<sup>36</sup> In his column “The Way I See It,” fellow writer Kenneth Kaufman stated that “a cross section from almost the beginnings of poetry in Oklahoma...down to the youngsters who haven’t properly speaking, broken into print yet.”<sup>37</sup> Tilghman was effective in making her goal with this society. She encouraged writers who were just starting out as well as promoting and securing recognition for Oklahoma poets who had been in the literary world for years.

During her time with the Federal Writers’ Project, Tilghman continued to write. Two articles appeared in *American Anthropologist* and she published her first serious historical book called *Quanah, the Eagle of the Comanche’s* (1938), based on the lives of Cynthia Ann Parker and Quanah Parker, chief of the Comanches. Tilghman used the project as an opportunity to branch into other forms of writing. She experimented with writing lyrics to musicals scores. Many of the pieces were based on Native American chants and traditional songs. She worked with Julie M. Butree and Ruth Flanders McNaughton on the scores. The Indian Suite, a group of compositions arranged by McNaughton with words by Tilghman included a Cheyenne Country Song, Buffalo Song, Osage Deer Song and Sitting Bulls Song.<sup>38</sup>

A manuscript that corresponds with the music states “Ruth Flanders McNaughton has taken the Indian melodies without change of a note, and written with them a symbolic harmonization... Some are from phonograph records collected for the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology.”<sup>39</sup> The duo was interested in preserving the cultural significance of the music as well as the lyrics. She translated the traditional lyrics from the native languages into

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<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Tilghman Re-Elected President; Place on Board Given to Mrs. Stealy,” *The Oklahoman*, 24 February 1935, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth C. Kaufman, “The Way I See It,” *The Oklahoman*, 1 March 1936, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Musical Scores, folder 17, box 6, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>39</sup> Manuscript, folder 18, box 6, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

English as accurately as possible. “Zoe Tilghman has written words, taking care to make a true rendering of the Indian thought. Translation is not enough since often the Indian words are of incomplete sentences and use symbolic words that represent a whole idea to the Indians, but have little or no meaning for the Whiteman”<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, Tilghman wrote a ballet called *The Lost Prophet*, which followed the story of the ghost dance among Indians in Western Oklahoma. The composition was rejected by the federal music project.<sup>41</sup> She also tried her hand at writing a radio drama based on the Sapulpa Massacre of 1934, and lyrics for a motion picture contest. The score was called “Mother for You.”<sup>42</sup> Tilghman added to her musical repertoire by writing several other songs and at least one commercial jingle for fire prevention; however, her jingle reads more like a poem and does not have a direct link to ways of preventing fires.<sup>43</sup> She was unique because of her willingness to branch out into other art forms. She deviated from her contemporaries because she moved with the times and used every opportunity to expand her audience.

Subsequent to her dismissal from the FWP, Tilghman went back to school to study languages and education. She graduated from Central State College in Edmond, Oklahoma in 1947.<sup>44</sup> While at the institution, she took Spanish, Greek, Latin, French and Orchestra in addition to her education classes.<sup>45</sup> She graduated with an A.B. in education, majoring in Latin and minoring in Greek, although she was qualified to teach English as

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<sup>40</sup>Manuscript, folder 18, box 6, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>41</sup> Manuscript for *The Lost Prophet*, folder 4, box 7, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>42</sup> Manuscript for Radio Drama, folder 5, box 7, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>43</sup> Fire Prevention Jingle, folder 15, box 6, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>44</sup> Diploma from Central State College, folder 7, box 8, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>45</sup> Grade Slips, folder 5, box 8, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.



well.<sup>46</sup> She was granted a teaching certificate for teaching grades seven through twelve in 1947 and 1949. Tilghman was also issued teaching certificates in the states of Nevada and Montana.<sup>47</sup> She moved to Carlin, Nevada, for a year after graduating from Central State.<sup>48</sup>

After returning from Nevada, she continued with her writing career. She published the long awaited biography of her husband titled *Marshal of the Last Frontier; Life and Services of William Matthew Tilghman, For 50 Years One of the Greatest Peace Officers of the West*. The work was published in 1949 to mixed reviews and served to cement William Tilghman's position as a hero in Oklahoma history. Zoe went on to collaborate with Harlow's Publishing Company on a series of children's books featuring Native American topics. Included was *A Boy of the Powhatans*, *Katska of the Seminoles*, *Nanek, Friend of Little Turtle*, *Maiom, the Cheyenne Girl*, *Sacajawea, the Shoshoni*, and *Mika, the Osage Boy*. Additionally, Tilghman produced *Oklahoma Stories* and *Stories of Oklahoma*, although not a part of the children's series the books were produced by Harlow's. The publications coincided with Tilghman's participation in television.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, she was involved in an unorthodox method of promoting Oklahoma history. She was contacted by Mitchell Gertz, a movie producer in Hollywood, who was interested in using a scene from her book *Marshal of the Last Frontier; Life and Services of William Matthew Tilghman, for Fifty Years One of the Greatest Peace Officers of the West*<sup>49</sup>. Additionally, Gertz informed Tilghman that the

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<sup>46</sup> Note from the University of Central Oklahoma Alumni Association, 5 July, 1995, vertical file on Zoe Tighman, Research Center, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>47</sup> Teaching Certificates, folder 5, box 8, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection McFarlin Library.

<sup>48</sup> Note from the University of Central Oklahoma Alumni Association, 5 July, 1995, vertical file on Zoe Tighman, Research Center, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Michell Gertz to Zoe Tilghman, folder 8, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

producers of the popular television show *Death Valley Days* wanted her to appear in the episode “The Wedding Dress” which re-enacted the marriage ceremony between the Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory in 1907 when the two were united into one state. She appeared in the prologue and epilogue of the show.<sup>50</sup> Both she and Bill were characters in the storyline, Brad Johnson was to play Bill, and Mary Webster played Zoe. Additionally, Tilghman acted as a consultant on several other western movies and shows. She gave suggestions and ideas to the producers as to how to make the productions more realistic and true to the facts.<sup>51</sup> Her use of unorthodox methods to record the history of Oklahoma makes Tilghman an important part of history because she went beyond the normal channels of preservation.

Tilghman died of cancer in 1964, in a Belle Isle nursing home in Oklahoma City and is buried in Chandler next to her husband and son Richard.<sup>52</sup> Up until her death, she continued to research and submit stories and articles. Her last article “A Bed for God” was published in the spring 1965 edition of *Oklahoma Today*. Along with her article the editor included a paragraph about Tilghman and her accomplishments. “We believe that any person who reads ‘A Bed for God,’ thoughtfully, will be a better person for having done so. In reading it you are sharing, in part, the love and understanding that overflowed Zoe Tilghman’s heart.”<sup>53</sup> She contributed to the literary history of Oklahoma by making the past available to everyone regardless of age or location. She aimed to teach native Oklahomans, especially children, and the rest of the country about the interesting and

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<sup>50</sup> Letter from Mitchell Gertz to Zoe Tilghman, folder 8, box 11, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Mitchell Gertz to Zoe Tilghman, folder 11, box 8, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>52</sup> Photocopy of Newspaper Articles, Vertical File on Tilghman Family, Historical Research Department, Museum of Pioneer History, Chandler, Oklahoma.

<sup>53</sup> Zoe A. Tilghman, “A Bed for God,” *Oklahoma Today*, Spring 1965, 27.

unique history of her state using both traditional and non-traditional methods. She wrote contemporaneously with some of the greatest authors and historians of Oklahoma, and managed to enjoy a successful career in the literary world.

Tilghman was an interesting part of Oklahoma history. She was married to one of the most famous lawmen in the states' history and was a part of the controversy surrounding the Oklahoma Writers' Project. Even though she did not bring original material to the field of history, she found a niche writing popular historical fiction centered on the adventure and mystery of the West. Her books are entertaining and relatively short with the exception of her two biographies. While her contemporaries produced more academic, disciplined works, Tilghman used mostly undocumented sources and personal experiences as evidence for her writing.<sup>54</sup> As a result of her research methods and writing technique, she does not fall into the same category as other women authors such as Angie Debo and Alice Marriott. Despite her dramatic flair, she was still an important part of Oklahoma history, her stories, although not strictly historical, documented an important part of the states' history. She acted as a contrast to the serious interpretation of her fellow writers.

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<sup>54</sup> Tilghman rarely cited sources in her writing.

## Chapter Two: Historiography and Context: Where Does She Fit in?

Women writers in the West were a compilation of unique, intelligent individuals that saw the frontier as a region of mystery and adventure. The area offered opportunities to study new cultures, different societies, and to observe how the westward movement affected the country as a whole. Some of the greatest historians in Oklahoma wrote during the early years of statehood. Zoe Tilghman was among the writers who took advantage of the western setting. Context plays an important part of understanding the world that Tilghman lived in and how she fit in. How did she compare to not only other Oklahoma writers, but regional authors as well? What characteristics did they share and how did she differ?

Early American women writers wrote about what they knew. Domestic scenes, social gossip and household information played a dominant role in their writings. However, at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the expansion of the country and the migration westward changed the way that women viewed the world. The change in perspective was evident in their writings. Most women wrote diaries or travel journals never intended for publication, as time passed more women began to write with the idea of publishing their works for a larger audience.<sup>1</sup> They faced many obstacles. The world of western writing had been solidly dominated by male writers such as Frederick Jackson Turner and his students. Women had to work hard to be seen as legitimate writers of fiction and even harder when they strived for a more

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<sup>1</sup> Shirley A. Leckie and Nancy J. Parezo, eds. *Their Own Frontier: Women Intellectuals Re-Visioning the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 6.

academic audience. Oklahoma was the forefront of the western frontier and attracted many historians, anthropologists and writers both male and female, as well as being an inspiration to many writers who did not actually live in Oklahoma. A few of the famous historians to come out of Oklahoma were Angie Debo, Muriel Wright and Carolyn Foreman. Women writers in Oklahoma history covered a range of topics and entered all genres of writing. “Willa Cather once said to her family that she could tell the writers of current popular fiction things about the old west they had never heard of- but she added “because I wear skirts and don’t shave, they wouldn’t believe me.”<sup>2</sup> The early figures of Western interpretation were primarily men, as the first group to go west they paved the way for later historians. Their interpretations are an important starting point when looking at the literature of the West.

Frederick Jackson Turner, Herbert Eugene Bolton and Walter Prescott Webb were the progenitors of frontier literature and history. Their primary drive for writing was interpretation. As civilization expanded westward historians and authors used their writings to try and understand what the changes meant. The western frontier was completely different from the civilized eastern United States. The differences in how people lived and acted were prominent and called for interpretation. Men were the first to travel out west, and as such were the first to try and figure out what the expansion meant to not only the country, but to the new American culture as a whole. Turner’s frontier thesis is recognized as the premier work for understanding the importance of frontier ideology and its influence on American thinking. His significant texts include *The Frontier in American History* (1920), *Western State Making in the Revolutionary Era*

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<sup>2</sup>L.L. Lee and Merrill Lewis, *Women, Women Writers, and the West* (Troy: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1979), 161.

(1895), *The Policy of France Toward the Mississippi Valley in the Period of Washington and Adams* (1905), and *Geographical Influences in American Political History* (1914).

Turner's thesis states that the frontier was the best explanation for why American history is distinctive. According to Turner each generation returned to primitive conditions in order to advance the line of civilization. The frontier was the center of Americanization and the cultural traits attributed to Americans were influenced by the area.<sup>3</sup>

Herbert Eugene Bolton studied under Turner and made a significant impact on the study and perspective of the west. Bolton focused his research on the concept of the Spanish Borderlands. Additionally, he championed the need to look at America as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Walter Prescott Webb was the last third of the early western triumvirate. Webb focused on Texas history and law enforcement. He wrote the definitive text on the Texas Rangers titled *The Texas Rangers; A Century of Frontier Defense* (1935). Webb, in his book *The Great Plains* (1931), proposed that westward settlement stalled at the ninety eighth meridian, which was marked by a division of wooded and arid environments. He also proposed that the pioneers had to wait for technology to catch up with them. Additionally, he put forth the idea that new lands discovered by explorers lead to the rise of wealth, capitalism, and democracy.<sup>5</sup> Since the publication Turner, Bolton, and Webb, many historians have put forth their own theories about the settlement of the West. Women writers were a part of the group who offered new interpretations that both

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<sup>3</sup> William M. Brewer, "The Historiography of Frederick Jackson Turner," *The Journal of Negro History* 44 (July 1959): 240-1.

<sup>4</sup> Texas State Historical Society, "Herbert Eugene Bolton," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, [www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online) (Accessed 17 January 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Texas State Cemetery, "Walter Webb," [www.cemetery.state.tx.us/pub/user\\_form.asp?](http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/pub/user_form.asp?) (Accessed 17 January 2010).

supported and contradicted the earlier work of their male counterparts. Zoe Tilghman was a member of that group.

As women moved out west with their families or independently, they wanted to add their own perspective and interpretation on how the westward movement affected their country and society. Women writers took a slightly different path when writing about the west. L.L. Lee and Merrill Lewis authors of *Women, Women Writers and the West* stated that “it is because most women did not choose westward migration that their attitudes differed from that of men,” the fact that females were moved from their established homes in the East and taken out West to live in primitive conditions gave them a unique perspective on the West.<sup>6</sup> Many kept journals and diaries; early women wrote as if they were a part of an audience, and they wrote about the travel, domestic situations and experiences with family and friends.<sup>7</sup> However, as time went on women opened up to the idea of writing for a larger audience. The early female authors wrote mainly fiction that had the west as a backdrop for their stories. The predecessors of the famous frontier writers did not attempt to write as if they were authorities on the West this set them apart from their male counterparts.<sup>8</sup> Among the notable writers were Willa Cather, Dorothy Scarborough, Jessie Benton Fremont, Helen Hunt Jackson, and Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clapp.

Willa Cather was born in Virginia, but moved to Nebraska in 1883 at the age of nine, when the state was still largely uninhabited and wild. Cather used the West as a background for her fictional stories. She was interested in history and used it to add depth

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<sup>6</sup> Lee and Lewis, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Shirley A. Leckie and Nancy J. Parezo, eds. *Their Own Frontier: Women Intellectuals Re-Visioning the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Leckie, and Parezo, *Frontier*, 6.

to her plots. She stated that the whole region of the West seemed like one big state. Her most popular books include *O Pioneers* (1913), *My Antonia* (1918), and *A Lost Lady* (1923). Cather differed from other authors of her time because she did not use her writings to record the times, places and events that she saw.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than interpretation, Cather used the past to advance her plots and construct atmosphere, she used her writing as a way to critique society. Her books paint pictures of everyday people of early Nebraska.<sup>10</sup> Growing up, she witnessed the change in Nebraska from a sparsely populated countryside to a more urban setting. The change in geography and demographics were major influences in her writings. As Cather was not a historian or a historical novelist, she changed the times, places and contexts of events in her books. She focuses on the settlement and acculturation taking place in Nebraska rather than the typical Western themes like cowboys, Indians and explorers. Cather's works have an anthropological rather than historical feel. Marcus Cunliffe said of Cather's incorporation of historical monuments, "as a wondering student of American history, went to see them [Mesa Verde cliff dwellings] a quarter of a century ago, having read about them in Willa Cather, and know that they enlarged the meaning of that history for me." Cather differed from Tilghman because she did not write in order to record history. She did not base her stories off of her personal experience. Cather and Tilghman share their vivid descriptions of the landscape in their books. Dorothy Scarborough differed from both women because of her perspective on various aspects of the West

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<sup>9</sup> Lee and Lewis, 161-65

<sup>10</sup> Educational Broadcasting Corporation, "Willa Cather," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/willa-cather/about-willa-cather/549/> (Accessed 11 November 2010).



Dorothy Scarborough took a slightly different perspective on using the west in her books.<sup>11</sup> She was born in 1878 in Sweetwater, Texas. She spent most of her childhood in Waco. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Baylor University and went on to receive her Ph.D. from Columbia University. Scarborough chose Sweetwater as the setting for her book *The Wind* deliberately because she was familiar with the region, land and the people and chose to write about what she knew. She also asserted that many aspects of Texas life had not been addressed by other writers. Scarborough differed from Cather in the fact that she incorporated folklore and psychological aspects into her writing. Whereas Cather did not include interpretation into her writing, Scarborough used psychology to interpret certain aspects of the West.<sup>12</sup>

She was a member of the Texas folklore society and used the local stories in her writing. Scarborough differed from many other western writers because she did not portray the West as a place of unending adventure and opportunity. She acknowledged the adventure to be found in the West but does not emphasize it like many of her contemporaries. Her book *The Wind* was unpopular because of its unhappy and tragic story.<sup>13</sup> Scarborough used the environment extensively in her book however unlike her predecessors she treats the landscape like an enemy. She dispensed with the poetic descriptions of the beautiful scenes and focuses on how the weather and geography affected the lives of the people of West Texas in a negative way.<sup>14</sup> Her writing was similar to Tilghman's in that she used a familiar landscape as a backdrop to her stories. Scarborough wrote about what she knew, although unlike Tilghman she viewed the

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<sup>11</sup> Lee and Lewis, 165-70.

<sup>12</sup> Lee and Lewis, 178.

<sup>13</sup> Lee and Lewis, 175-178.

<sup>14</sup> Lee and Lewis, 176-78.

landscape in an unflattering way. She was at odds with Tilghman's poetic descriptions of nature. Jessie Benton Fremont shared the excitement and mystery that were often fixtures in Tilghman's writing; however, she differed on at least one key point.

Freemont's writings explored the opposite reason for coming to the West; the adventure of the unknown. She was born in Missouri in 1824, daughter of a powerful senator. Her family was untraditional in that her father insisted that his daughters as well as his sons be fully educated. The Benton children were encouraged to be independent and intellectual. Both girls and boys played outdoors, no separation existed between the types of activities either was allowed to participate in.<sup>15</sup> She was exposed to politics and educated on the workings of the social structure.<sup>16</sup> Freemont's father, in an attempt to avoid marrying his daughter off to soon sent Jessie to Miss English's Seminary for Girls, a fashionable boarding school outside of Washington, D.C. Attending the institution was one of the only conventional acts of Freemont's life. She met and married John C. Freemont while at the school and was introduced the excitement of an explorer's life.<sup>17</sup>

She started out in the literary world by writing her husband's reports after he returned from an expedition. A topic still debated today is how much of John Freemont's reports were actually written by Jessie. Many of the accounts have "vivid scenes and vignettes which are thought to be hers."<sup>18</sup> Although the papers were published under John's name, Jessie did not mind having her work published under the name of her husband. Her philosophy was "people don't read books written by women. Besides, it

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<sup>15</sup> Julie Danneburg, *Women Writers of the West: Five Chroniclers of the American Frontier* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 1.

<sup>16</sup>"Jessie Benton Fremont,"

<http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/champions/JessieBentonFremont.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Danneburg, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Danneburg, 11.

was John's story. A wife's place is to work behind the scenes, not to try and steal the show from her husband."<sup>19</sup> Freemont, in addition to her prowess in the literary world was the first highly visible wife of a congressional/presidential candidate. Towards the end of her life she turned towards writing essays and stories about the history that she had witnessed in order to help feed her family.<sup>20</sup>

Freemont shared Tilghman's love of adventure and exploration. Both clearly show their love of the uncivilized country in their writings. The two women had atypical childhoods, used their husbands' fame to launch their careers, and turned to writings in order to feed their families. They differed on one important point. Tilghman published all her work under her own name and wanted the credit, whereas Freemont was alright with publishing under her husbands' name. The link between Cather, Scarborough and Freemont is that they all made the West out to be a fascinating place with many facets to be explored. Cather described natural monuments in such detail that a visit is almost necessary, Scarborough challenges the reader to face the obstacles waiting in the arid deserts and Freemont lures the readers with the excitement of the unknown. Helen Hunt Jackson's life and career was similar to Tilghman and Cather but differed from Freemont.

Helen Hunt Jackson was another woman who came west and found the area a great source of literary inspiration. Jackson was born in 1830 in Amherst Massachusetts. After both her parents died in quick succession, she spent her early education in boarding schools. After graduating she became a teacher until she met her husband Edward Hunt. Two years later Jackson's husband and son died, she took her grief and channeled it into writing poetry. She sent a poem to the *New York Evening Post*, they published her piece.

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<sup>19</sup> Danneburg, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Danneburg, 13-14.

The event served as the beginning point in Jackson's literary career. She moved to Rhode Island to pursue a full time job as a writer and was popular among several magazines and newspapers. When she became ill with a chronic cough, her doctor recommended that she move to Colorado in order to encourage healing. November 1873, Jackson boarded a train to the West. The region was featured heavily in Jackson's poems and essays. One work published in *The Independent* shared her first impressions of Colorado Springs. "I shall never forget my sudden sense of hopeless disappointment at the moment when I first looked on the town."<sup>21</sup>

Jackson's attitude towards Colorado Springs began to change after a few weeks of living there. She saw the openness and lack of civilization as a blessing. She had a wide, clear view of the mountains and described the view as "that plain and those mountains are to me well-nigh the fairest spot on earth."<sup>22</sup> From 1871 on most of her income came from one publication, *Scribner's Monthly*, she received \$400 for one of her pieces. In 1878, Jackson moved back to Boston in order to help choose poems for her new volume, a "No Name" book. The first of her two books chronicling the struggle of the Native Americans was titled *A Century of Dishonor* (1880) and detailed the actions taken against the Native Americans by the United States government.<sup>23</sup> She completed *Ramona* just before her death in 1885. Jackson enjoyed an unusual career and adult life. She created a business for herself based solely on her talent as an author and continued to write throughout her second marriage to William Jackson. Although younger, he did not let Helen's writing interfere with their marriage, and ignored the fact that she was extremely

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<sup>21</sup> Danneburg, 49-50.

<sup>22</sup> Danneburg, 54.

<sup>23</sup> University of California, "A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings With Some of the Indian Tribes (1900)," California Digital Library, <http://www.archive.org/details/centurydishonor00jackrich> (Accessed 11 November 2010).

independent and understood business, both qualities not ideally found in a wife for that time, especially for someone of William's generation.<sup>24</sup> Jackson and Tilghman shared an interest in Native American culture and Western history. Both women wrote poetry and managed to make a successful career outside of their spouses. Additionally, Tilghman and Jackson shared similar relationships with their significant others. A large age gap existed between Zoe and Bill, and Helen and William. Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe was the most different from Tilghman out of all the women. She was not a typical female historian or writer.

Clappe ventured out to San Francisco and wrote letters detailing the life of women in the California gold mine country. She was born in Elizabethtown, New Jersey; she completed her early education and went on to teach. She continued with her studies while travelling around the New England area. She met and married Fayette Clappe and moved with him to San Francisco. When they arrived Fayette fell ill and stayed that way for almost a year. After he recovered they moved north to Sacramento for Fayette's camp medical practice. During the transitional period was when Louise began to write. Her first essay appeared in *The Herald* in 1851, subsequently, she submitted two more poems and a couple more essays, using the pen name Dame Shirley. Clappe and her husband decided to spend the winter of 1851 in a mountain camp digging for gold. Throughout her stay in the camp, she wrote numerous letters to her sister which described the life of women in the mining camps. She described the "colorful" characters that appeared at her husband's medical practice on a regular basis.<sup>25</sup> She wrote to her sister of the conditions in the

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<sup>24</sup> Danneburg, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Danneburg, 18, 24.

mining camps and stated “Really, everybody ought to go to the mines, just to see how little it takes to make people comfortable in the world.”<sup>26</sup>

Some debate exists on the reason that Clappe wrote so many letters to her sister. On one side, some scholars think that she wrote with the intention of getting them published eventually, while others believe that she wrote purely to keep in touch with her sister. Her previous essays had been written in letter format which supports the publication theory as does the fact that she made copies of the letters before she sent them to her sister. Julie Danneburg, author of *Women Writers of the West: Five Chroniclers of the American Frontier* offers a comparison to Isabella Bird who recorded her journey through the Colorado mountains by way of writing letters to her sister. She kept the letters with the intention of publishing them when she got home.<sup>27</sup> When violence broke out in the mining camp in 1852, the Clappe’s left for San Francisco, not much later they divorced and Louise stayed in California while Fayette went to Hawaii. She started to publish her letters under her pen name after she saw a publication that ran similar content. Her letters ran in the magazine for twenty three months. She continued to write until her death. Her letters were published in book form as *The Shirley Letters: From the California Mines, 1851-1852* in 1998.<sup>28</sup> Clappe is the most different from Tilghman out of all the authors mentioned. The only similarity between the two women’s careers was the fact that they published poetry and a few essays.

Oklahoma, as the last unsettled section of the frontier, produced some of the most recognized women historians and writers in the region. Oklahoma at the turn of the twentieth century was still divided into two separate sections, Indian Territory and

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<sup>26</sup> Danneburg, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Danneburg, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Danneburg, 31.

Oklahoma territory. The dichotomy between the two cultures provided an abundance of material for writers across the literary spectrum. Historians watched as the uncivilized territory worked its way to statehood, while anthropologists roamed among the various tribes relocated to Oklahoma. Fiction writers took the romance and adventure of the cowboys and prairie life and wrote dramatic stories that captured the imagination of the public. A few of the notable women writers from Oklahoma were Angie Debo, Muriel Wright, Carolyn Forman Grant, and Alice Marriott.

Angie Debo was born in 1890 in Beattie, Kansas, then moved with her family to Marshall, Oklahoma a few years later. She went through the public school system in Marshall; however, no high school existed. She did receive her common school diploma and went on to receive her teaching certificate. Debo finally graduated from Marshall High School in 1913 when she was twenty- three years old. After completing her early education, she attended the University of Oklahoma and studied history under Edward Everett Dale, one of the popular historians of the day. Dale had been a student of Frederick Jackson Turner, the leading historian of Western history. Debo graduated in 1918 with a bachelor's degree in history, and with the encouragement of Dale, applied to two graduate schools; University of Chicago and Columbia University. She chose to go to Chicago and studied foreign policy. From her studies she produced her master's thesis *The Historical Background of the American Policy of Isolationism* (1924). Post-graduation, Debo entered a job field where women were not generally accepted outside of women's colleges and teaching positions. She continued to write throughout her career.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Patricia Loughlin, *Hidden Treasures of the American West: Muriel H. Wright, Angie Debo, and Alice Marriott* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 73-87.

In 1933 Debo received her PhD from the University of Oklahoma. She is most famous for her work with Native Americans and oral history. Her book *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* published in 1934, has stood the test of time and is still a definitive text. In her book she studied the Choctaw nation from the end of the civil war to statehood in 1907. The publication was an extension of her doctoral dissertation. Debo published many books in the ethnographic field. A few of her other works include: *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (1940), *Prairie City* (1944), and *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (1941). Debo was well known because she focused on the injustices done to the Native Americans. *And Still the Waters Run* is considered Debo's greatest publication. The text focused on the effects of government policies towards the Five Civilized Tribes.<sup>30</sup> Her books had a more controversial quality than others of her time. Tilghman shared a love of Oklahoma history with Debo, both were interested in Native American culture; however, they differed in their writing styles and research methods. Debo was more formal in her book. She lacked the casual, fictional style that marked much of Tilghman's writing. Additionally, Debo had university training that helped her be a more thorough, disciplined researcher. Muriel Wright and Debo painted contrasting pictures of the treatment of Native Americans and how they adapted to the new way of life in Oklahoma. They were contemporaries, but were often at odds with each other.<sup>31</sup>

Wright, a contemporary of Debo and Tilghman, focused on Native American history as well. She was born in 1889 at Lehigh, Choctaw Nation, in the Indian Territory. She received most of her early education from her mother however; she did receive some

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<sup>30</sup> Loughlin, 95.

<sup>31</sup> Loughlin, 52.



education at the Presbyterian Mission School and at the Baptist school. After finishing her early education, Wright attended Wheaton Seminary in Massachusetts. In 1912 Wright returned to Lehigh and pursued a teaching career. She worked in Johnston County and by 1914 had risen up the ranks to attain the position of principal. Holding the administrative position was rare for a women educator of that time period.<sup>32</sup>

Just before World War I, Wright began work on her master's degree in history and English at Barnard College, the women's division of Columbia University. She did not complete her degree program because of the conflict. She returned home and continued with her teaching career. Wright was actively involved in Choctaw politics, her interest influenced her involvement with Choctaw history. Her first publication was in collaboration with Joseph Thoburn, a board member for the Oklahoma Historical Society. The book was titled *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People*, published in 1929. Wright strived to keep the balance between the Native American and white settler history. Along the same lines, she understood the need to have equal representation of contributions made by both cultures to the state's history. She wrote several textbooks to be adopted within the public school system. The pieces *Our Oklahoma* (1939) and *The Oklahoma History* (1955) were chosen to be used by the local education population. In 1943 Wright became the associate editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*. While working at the *Chronicles*, she also wrote articles about Native American topics and Oklahoma history. Other works created by Wright were *Mark of Heritage: Oklahoma Historical Markers* (1958) co-authored with George H. Shirk and *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (1951).<sup>33</sup> Wright, Tilghman and Debo all shared a common interest in Native

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<sup>32</sup> Loughlin, 22, 27, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Loughlin, 38-48.

American culture, language and Oklahoma history. Wright and Tilghman shared the experience of working on a publication. Carolyn Thomas Foreman focused less on Native American history and more on general topics and she shared several key characteristics with Tilghman.

Foreman wrote about broader topics than her contemporaries and started out assisting her husband. She was born in 1872 in Metropolis, Illinois. Her early education took place in private and public schools in Washington D.C. She continued on to Monticello College in Godfrey, Illinois. The Foreman family moved to Muskogee, Indian Territory after her father was appointed a federal judge by President William McKinley. She started in the writing world by helping her husband, taking notes and translating manuscripts into English from French. In 1931, Foreman started to work on her own book *Oklahoma Imprints, 1835-1907: A History of Printing in Oklahoma Before Statehood*, published in 1936. The work is still used today. During her education she was given lessons in French and German while living with her family in Belgium, her understanding of foreign languages came into play with her next book *Indians Abroad: 1493-1938* published in 1943. Foreman also published a volume on American Indian women chiefs as well as writing several articles for the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

In addition to her publications, Foreman was involved in community activities. She worked with the American Red Cross in Muskogee during the First World War and suggested that the Oklahoma Historical Society create a subject index to the Oklahoma newspapers and collect memories from the early day pioneers. Both ideas were put into action by the Works Progress Administration during the depression.<sup>34</sup> Foreman and

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<sup>34</sup> *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, s.v. "Carolyn Thomas Foreman," Linda D. Wilson, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FO019.html> (accessed January 11, 2010).

Tilghman shared knowledge of foreign languages that came in handy with their work. Both women were also involved in various projects around the city. Alice Marriot differed from the other Oklahoma writers; she spent many hours in the field and took an ethnographical approach to her research.

Marriot was born in 1910 in Wilmette, Illinois. As a young girl, she visited the Chicago Field Museum with her grandfather. The early visits sparked her interest in Native American culture. At the age of seven, she moved with her family to Oklahoma City. The move proved chaotic for the Marriot family and they had to adapt to a new way of life, the experience was beneficial to Alice especially in her later life working as an anthropologist. She attended Oklahoma City University and graduated with a degree in English and French. After completing her degree she worked for the Muskogee public library system as a cataloger. When the Depression hit, the library created several special projects in order to prevent the employees from losing their jobs. Marriot was assigned the local history collection and became knowledgeable about the Five Civilized Tribes in Oklahoma. She wanted to pursue her interest in anthropology at the University of Oklahoma as a graduate student; however, no graduate program in anthropology existed. She received her second bachelors in anthropology and conducted fieldwork while completing her studies.<sup>35</sup>

Marriot obtained a job working for the newly created Indian Arts and Crafts Board. She produced a study titled *The Trade Guild of the Southern Cheyenne Women* detailing her research of the Cheyenne women's craft guild. Her study was the first "purely ethnological paper" for the board.<sup>36</sup> Some of Marriot's other publications include

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<sup>35</sup> Loughlin, 111-120.

<sup>36</sup> Loughlin, 120.

*Greener Fields: Experiences Among the American Indians* (1953), *The Ten Grandmothers* (1945), and *Kiowa Years* (1968). *Greener Fields* is an autobiographical account of her field research, while *Ten Grandmothers*, part of the Civilization of American Indian series details stories from the Kiowa people starting in the 1840s through the Second World War. She wrote from an ethnographic perspective, and looked at all aspects of the life of the Kiowa's including reservation life, the continuing westward movement of the white population and the assimilation policies. She worked in the field in order to get the research for her book much like other women anthropologists of her day. Marriot's texts, especially *Ten Grandmothers* are still used today in Native American research.<sup>37</sup> Tilghman's similarities with Marriot reached only as far as their interests, they differed in the level of academic credibility and research methodology. Oklahoma women wrote fiction and poetry throughout the early twentieth century, Tilghman was among their ranks.

Oklahoma before and after statehood enjoyed a varied and illustrious literary history. The earliest female fiction writer in Oklahoma published her first novel around 1901. Mrs. Graham Lewis wrote *Gryndine, A Woman With a Conscience*, published by the State Capitol Publishing Company in Guthrie, Oklahoma.<sup>38</sup> Ten years later, Mary Kroh Colvin wrote *Ironica, a Romance of the Rockies*. In 1916, Mrs. Venus G. Booth followed with her book *As the Fates Decree*, published by the Fifth Avenue Publishing Company. Booth also wrote several other books including *The Mystery of Rachel* (1917) and *The Wives of Deacon* (1920). In 1926, Mrs. Alma Estella Henderson wrote *Whispering Creek* a novel set in the Kiamichi Mountains in southern Oklahoma. The plot

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<sup>37</sup> Loughlin, 127-131.

<sup>38</sup> Elaine Boylan and Marable Mary Hays, *Handbook of Oklahoma Writers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 3

featured a young doctor who was looking to bring justice to his father's murderer. The book was included in the romance genre.<sup>39</sup> Other literary mediums were also popular during the early years of women's fiction. Popular magazines often published short stories and articles about feminine topics. Mrs. Lulu Linton, from Jones, Oklahoma, was one of the first to have an article published in one of the periodicals. The piece was titled "The Reincarnation of Sarah Marg'et." The work appeared in *Women's Home Companion* in 1903. Another approved literary method for women was poetry. Celeste Ball May and Minnie Keith Bailey published poems. May wrote "Sounds of Prairie" in 1886. Bailey produced "Life's Undertow."<sup>40</sup> Tilghman fit the typical profile of a female writer in Oklahoma at the turn of the century. She wrote for magazines and published books that featured a romanticized image of the west.

At the turn of the century, American writing saw a change. The introduction of the female voice into the literary world brought new perspective to how not only the West was perceived, but how society and culture had changed over the years. Writing within specific regions lends its own flavor to the overall compilation of American literature. L.L. Lee and Merrill Lewis, writers of *Women, Women Writers and the West*, explained the significance of regional writers.

It is something of a commonplace in American literary history to say that the central significance of regional writing in late nineteenth-century may not have been America's literary discovery of place- or local color- or the regionalist's contribution to literary realism... The major significance of such writing may have been- indeed was- the opportunities it gave writers, especially women writers, to render the condition of women in American society or to explore the woman's perception of reality.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Boylan and Marable, 14-15

<sup>40</sup> Boylan and Marable, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Lee and Lewis, v.

As women started to write about certain aspects of frontier life, a whole new picture of the West emerged.

Historians of western literature tended to focus on the male elements of conquest and expansion. Women scholars in this genre were faced with the obstacle of proving that they were capable of being as objective and scientific as their male counterparts.<sup>42</sup>

Female western scholars brought a different perspective to western literature. They added a complexity that had not been present before in terms of perceptions on western expansion and especially the roles of western women on the frontier. Females traditionally represented civilization, society, and home. The stark difference between what the West stood for and the reality of what most women were used to in terms of home and family served as an interesting subject for early women fiction writers

However, few carried the professional credentials that came with advanced university education. They did make an impact on the history of western literature and contributed to the representations of the west, especially in terms of Native Americans.<sup>43</sup>

Women fiction writers such as Willa Cather, Dorothy Scarborough used the West as a backdrop for their fictional plots, building upon the earlier travel narratives and journals. For example Cather's book *My Antonia* is based loosely on Cather's own experiences travelling to Nebraska and the experiences she had growing up on the frontier. She includes her own mixed feelings about the West into her books as well as using historical facts, just not always in their proper context. Cather relates to Scarborough on the latter point because both women incorporated their own experiences

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<sup>42</sup> Shirley A. Leckie and Nancy J. Parezo, "Introduction," in *Their Own Frontier: Women Intellectuals Re-Visioning the American West*, ed. Shirley A. Leckie and Nancy J. Parezo (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Loughlin, 162-72.

into their novels, not all of the impressions related in the texts are positive, especially in the case of Scarborough's novel *The Wind*.<sup>44</sup> Jessie Benton Freemont took a different approach to writing about the West. She wrote alongside her husband about the grand adventure to be found by exploring the unknown territories of the frontier. Freemont's writings were more factual and based on scientific observation whereas Cather and Scarborough focused on the fictional elements. All three women are adequate representations of early women's literary tradition in the West. They showcased a major draw for women to move out of the East, the ability to move outside the typical behavioral standards that had been in place for centuries. Women were able to explore their creativity as well as share their experiences with others from around the country. The West as a region produced challenges in terms of employment and recognition.

Women writers and historians experienced many difficulties gaining employment using their abilities and education. During the depression when historians such as Angie Debo and Muriel Wright were working in Oklahoma, jobs for women were traditionally in women's colleges or teaching in the public school system. Openings outside of these institutions had been dominated by men; as time went on a few women were able to acquire positions working in history departments and in the field. During the economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, the progress that females had made in the field was severely diminished.<sup>45</sup> Hiring for most history related jobs went to men because the employers argued that men needed the jobs more in order to feed their families.<sup>46</sup> Outside of teaching and publishing women faced other roadblocks. They were more likely to be

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<sup>44</sup> Lee and Lewis, 165.

<sup>45</sup> Leckie and Parezo, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Jan Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1-2; Leckie and Parezo, 22.

unemployed and not equally recognized within their profession, specifically the historical field. Female writers in the 1930s were largely unrecognized as a literary force, problems which have persevered to the modern day.<sup>47</sup>

Female writers of the 1930s were often overshadowed by the male writers of the decade.<sup>48</sup> Women in the historical profession were faced with the difficult task of obtaining a job that made full use of their intellect and education. During this time period females were still viewed as intellectually inferior; however, they continued to write articles and participate in professional conferences.<sup>49</sup> To combat the unequal atmosphere, women formed societies and organizations that allowed female historians to share their ideas and present papers in a friendly atmosphere. Groups such as the American Association of University Women and the General Federation of Women's Clubs were only two of the many programs that existed.<sup>50</sup>

In comparison with other women writers of the time in Oklahoma such as Angie Debo and Muriel Wright, Tilghman had little in the way of formal training. Both Debo and Wright had high levels of university training. The works that they produced were much more scholarly and accurate than those Tilghman produced. Her books showcased her literary talents more than her ability as a serious historian. The texts written by Debo and Wright are still used today in research.<sup>51</sup> Other female historians and anthropologists who worked during her time were often criticized as being literary, critics often described

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<sup>47</sup> Montefiore, 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Maroula Jannou, *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Jacqueline Goggin, "Challenging Sexual Discrimination in the Historical Profession: Women Historians and the American Historical Association, 1890-1940" *American Historical Review* 97 (June 1992): 769-802.

<sup>50</sup> Jacqueline Goggin, "Challenging Sexual Discrimination in the Historical Profession: Women Historians and the American Historical Society, 1890-1940." *American Historical Review* 97 (June 1992): 769-802.

<sup>51</sup> Loughlin, xvi.



the texts as being written for a popular audience and therefore, the results were not of a scholarly nature.<sup>52</sup> She fell into this category for many of her reviewers as well. A popular criticism of her work was the lack of sources.<sup>53</sup> She relied heavily on the stories Bill had told her of his time as a marshal. The lack of hard evidence to support her claims frustrated much of her audience.

Many of Tilghman's contemporaries focused more on anthropological aspects of Oklahoma culture and spent time conducting field research. They used Native American history as a means to critique society rather than using their own experiences. Tilghman wrote about both Native American's and outlaws. One characteristic that she shared with her fellow women historians was the idea that Oklahoma had a unique history that needed to be shared with the rest of the country. The women writers emerged as "agents of territorial expansion" who portrayed the history of the frontier as a mixture of the new American culture intertwined with the presence and culture of the Native Americans.<sup>54</sup>

Where does Tilghman fit into the world of Western women writers? Looking at a straight forward comparison, she was typical of the women who chose writing as a career at the turn of the twentieth century. She had an unconventional childhood working on a ranch with her father and having open access to horses and activities usually reserved for male children. She received most of her early education in a combination of public and home environments, which was comparable to the other Oklahoma writers. The Oklahoma and Western regional writers differ in this area. Many of the regional writers such as Cather, Freemont, Scarborough and Clappe had most of their schooling done in

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<sup>52</sup> Loughlin, 169.

<sup>53</sup> William B. Shellingberg, "Wyatt Earp and the "Buntline Special" Myth," *Kansas Historical Quarterlies* 42 (Summer 1976): 113-154. [http://kancoll.org/khq/1976/76\\_2\\_shillingberg.htm](http://kancoll.org/khq/1976/76_2_shillingberg.htm), (accessed 6 April 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Loughlin, xv-xxi.

public and boarding schools. However, all were born on the eastern seaboard and had access to better schooling. The Oklahoma frontier offered little in the way of schooling options especially past grade eight. Another aspect which Tilghman shared with many of the other women writers was the need to provide financially for her family. Many of these women lived during hard economic times. The Depression created a unique set of problems for women who needed or wanted to make a career for themselves outside their spouses. Tilghman's husband died leaving them without financial support, much like Freemont whose husband lost their money investing in bad business ventures. She was able to make a decent living; however, not quite as lucrative as Jackson's.

Tilghman was similar to her Oklahoma contemporaries in that she was interested in Native American culture, history and language. Debo, Wright and Marriot all studied Indian culture although they pursued their interests in an anthropological way rather than in a historical/fictional manner. Tilghman differed from her peers in Oklahoma and regionally because she lacked the advanced formal training that many of the other women writers received. She spent two years at the University of Oklahoma, but never received a degree from there. She did finish a bachelor's program at Central State University later on in life, with a degree in education and foreign languages. All of the writers, both regionally and locally, had one thing in common. All taught at one point or another in their career. Teaching was an easily accessible profession for females during the time period and all the women writers mentioned took advantage of the opportunities at one time or another. At least two of the authors worked for newspapers, journals or magazines at one point in their careers as well. Tilghman and Wright worked for publications in Oklahoma and found a certain amount of fame from having jobs there.

Tilghman gained some notoriety from working at *Harlow's Weekly* before her stint with the Oklahoma Writers Project, while Wright had a successful career at the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

Tilghman was unique in the fact that while most writers limited themselves to books, articles, poems and newspapers, Tilghman worked her way into other media such as film, television, lyric writing, and radio. She moved with the times in a way that the other writers who were alive to witness the changes did not. Some of the attraction to the new types of writing may have come from Tilghman's flair for the dramatic and quest for financial gain however she kept her options open to all possibilities. She shared many similar qualities with both the regional and Oklahoma writers during her time. She worked hard for her career and did not waste the opportunities that she was given to publish her work. She used her marriage to a famous U.S. Marshal as a jumping off point for her literary career and pursued it with a single-mindedness that matched many of her contemporaries. Even though she lacked the advanced formal training of her Oklahoma counterparts she managed to make a name for herself in Oklahoma for a short time. Her books differed from many of the western writers in that they lacked the anthropological aspect that was a common theme during the early twentieth century; she banked on the public's interest in the more fantastical aspect of the West such as cowboys, Indians and crime. Her early books and articles showcase her literary talent and interest in Oklahoma history.

### Chapter Three: Writing in the Early Years: 1917-1935

In the beginning years of her career, Tilghman experimented with several different styles of writing such as informational pieces, fiction and history. *Outlaw Days* was her first attempt at an Oklahoma history book; today the volume is one of her most well-known books. Throughout her early publications her style developed with the help of two writing services which served to give her direction and feedback. Her job at *Harlow's Weekly* acted as an additional influence on her writing. During her early years of authorship, she leaned toward a more fictional style that set her apart from the more notable historians of the day.

Zoe Tilghman's writing career began at the University of Oklahoma. She worked for the school's literary journal, *University Umpire*. During her time there she served as the literary editor. The Christmas issue of the publication featured the first poem written by Tilghman, an event that sparked a lifelong love of poetry.<sup>1</sup> After leaving the university and marrying William Tilghman, famous U.S. Marshal, Zoe continued to write. Her first full-fledged article appeared in the magazine *Women's Home Companion*. The piece, titled "An Automobile Camping Trip," featured several tips, and provided advice for families wanting to take a road trip. The article was typical for the time in which it appeared. Women often wrote informational pieces for popular magazines. She began her article by stating, "aside from the pleasure of the trip, the open-air life is a tonic for ailing bodies and worn nerves; good for old and young."<sup>2</sup> The article spans several pages and covered everything from clothing to beds to a list of items that a family needs in

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<sup>1</sup> Poetry Society Bulletin, folder 6, box 3, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman Oklahoma.

<sup>2</sup> Zoe A. Tilghman, "An Automobile Camping Trip," *Women's Home Companion* 44 (June 1917): 31.

order to cook during a road trip. “An Automobile Camping Trip” is an anomaly among Tilghman’s articles. For the duration of her career she never publishes another article of similar type, almost all of her other pieces feature Western themes and are either historically themed or purely fictional works.

In the fall of 1919, Tilghman published her second article. The work differed greatly from the first article published in the women’s magazine. “The Wives of Walking Sun” was a Native American themed fictional work featuring Walking Sun, a man with two wives. The piece takes place during a time of white encroachment on the native lands. The time is evident because the families live on allotments and are requested by the “Government” to have only one wife. This policy posed a problem for the main character because he has two wives and will have to choose between them. He devises a plan to marry one wife to his neighbor Joe Antelope. The plan does not work the way he intended, and in the end he ends up with no wife. Tilghman’s descriptions of the individuals in the story and the way she writes the plot serve to entertain the audience. Some of the details provided about the Native Americans in the story are not flattering. She employs various stereotypes such as medicine men and alcoholic tendencies attributed to many Native Americans and the use of the word “squaw.”<sup>3</sup> “The Wives of Walking Sun” was the first of her Native American themed pieces, although certainly not her last. She was paid fifty dollars for the story, which appeared in *Outlook*, Tilghman next began writing books.<sup>4</sup>

November 1, 1924, was a turning point in Tilghman’s life, both literary and personal. A corrupt prohibition agent, Wiley Lynn, shot her husband William Matthew

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<sup>3</sup> Zoe A. Tilghman, “The Wives of Walking Sun,” *Outlook* (November 1919):301.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Outlook Company to Zoe Tilghman, folder 10, box 2, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

Tilghman (Bill), officer of the law, in Cromwell, Oklahoma. Bill's death left Zoe with two children to raise and no financial means. Tilghman turned to writing as a way to support her family. The year following Bill's death, Zoe published her first book, *The Dugout*. The work featured six separate stories all linked together by a common setting of a dugout. From the publication of her book Tilghman earned almost sixty two dollars between July and September of 1926. She sold forty- seven copies.<sup>5</sup> In June of 1929, she sold an additional copy and received one dollar and fifty cents.<sup>6</sup>

The term "dugout" as used by Tilghman in her book does not refer to an area of a baseball field. The word is used to describe a dwelling usually occupied by buffalo hunters, criminals, and tradesmen in the old west. The men had several of these domiciles located in strategic locations around the prairies. Tilghman's book spans the lifetime of one of these dugouts. The first story recounts the lives of John and Dave, the original builders of the lodging. They travelled out west and became buffalo hunters at the start of the western expansion. In her work, she does not use dates until the very last story. The reader has to deduce the timeframe from historical clues throughout the story. The second chapter tells the story of Mak-te-o an older Native American woman who is unable to make the long trip to the next campsite and is left to die along the way. She is rescued by two buffalo hunters who deliver her to the nearest fort. To repay their kindness Mak-te-o warns Joe and Pike, her rescuers that the local Cheyenne tribe wanted to see them killed.

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<sup>5</sup> Royalty statement for *The Dugout*, July 1-September 30, 1926, folder 8, box 3, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>6</sup> Royalty Statement for *The Dugout* June 30, 1929, folder 11, box 2, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

The two men escape from the fort and find refuge in an old dugout, the one from the first tale.<sup>7</sup>

The third chapter, “The Whiskey Sellers” starts in the Lolla Rook saloon where Kiowa, a businessman down on his luck, meets Dixon, a known criminal. The two men decide that for very little money they can brew their own whiskey and sell the liquor to the Native Americans at an outrageously inflated price. They manage to find moderate success in their business venture until Dixon decides to steal a necklace from one of his customers. The victim of the crime turns the two distributors into the local marshal, who had been looking for them. The officers go to the criminals’ hideout, the dugout from the first two stories, they shoot Kiowa and take Dixon to prison. Tilghman builds upon the stereotype of the alcoholic Indians in this part of her book. She also portrayed the marshals as the heroes of the day, a theme seen throughout her writings. The fourth tale in *The Dugout*, recounts the life story of Bart Kester, a buffalo hunter and Texas Fan, a girl from out East who was left at a saloon by her “fiancé.” The dugout is the headquarters for Kester’s operation. Fan and Kester end up married in the end.<sup>8</sup>

Chapters four and five of the book follow the Collins family. Ira Collins filed a claim along Wolf Creek, the location of the old dugout. While being attacked by a band of Native Americans, Ira’s wife takes her children to the dwelling on the creek and with provisions left there throughout the years, including guns and ammunition manages to defend herself and her children from the security of the dugout. After the incident with the warriors, the Collins gave up their claim and move to a safer location. Years later Harriett Collins, daughter of the original homesteaders, meets George Perry who took up

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<sup>7</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *The Dugout*, (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1925), 2-28.

<sup>8</sup> Tilghman, *The Dugout*, 29-71.

the claim that Harriett's family abandoned. Collins remains a single woman, an anomaly for the time. She takes a claim next to Perry's and works the land. A duplicitous lawyer from the town and an old boyfriend plan to jump her claim. She ends up defending her claim with a shotgun in front of the old dugout her mother had used years before. Perry and Collins marry and at the end they have a conversation about the dugout.<sup>9</sup>

“The roof will fall in with the next big rain” says George. “Shall we fix it up?” His wife shakes her head. “It has served its day. I wonder what other tales it could tell? But let it sleep with its memories.”<sup>10</sup>

An article written about Tilghman's book appeared in *The Daily Oklahoman* in 1925. The reviewer stated “There is nothing of the exaggeration, the blood and thunder of the usual western thriller in this sane, clean book. You feel something more poignant, more pungent than that, you sense the real west.”<sup>11</sup> The writer also mentioned that the author “knows them all, and is fair to all alike. Her men and women are convincing.”<sup>12</sup> This statement about fairness does not necessarily apply by today's standards. The characters display stereotypical behaviors, and in the end good always wins against evil. Tilghman, in her first book sets the standard for her later books. She introduced her flair for the dramatic as well as her lyrical writing style. The common theme of the dugout was an interesting way of connecting all of the stories within the one volume. The book spans at least a century if not more. The original builders of the dugout started when western expansion was in the early stages and follows through to the last story which

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<sup>9</sup> Tilghman, *The Dugout*, 72-107.

<sup>10</sup> Tilghman, *The Dugout*, 107.

<sup>11</sup> “Dugout Story True to West” *The Oklahoman*, November 8, 1925, 44.

<sup>12</sup> “Dugout Story True to West,” *The Oklahoman*, November 8, 1925, 44.



takes place roughly around the 1920s because prohibition is mentioned.<sup>13</sup> She covered all aspects of Western life from buffalo hunting, liquor production, and raiding Indians to saloons, gambling, and prostitution. The above-mentioned volume was put on the approved textbook list for Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas. *The Dugout* began Tilghman's legacy of Western fiction. This book is a prime example of why she is not placed in the same category as other women historians of her time. Despite the fictional feel to *The Dugout*, Tilghman produced a story that entertained many Oklahomans and earned her a place in the states' literary history. Her next book published the following year, cements her reputation as a writer of wild west material and outlaw history.

*Outlaw Days: A True History of Early- Day Oklahoma Characters*, published by Harlow Publishing Company in 1926 was the first of Tilghman's forays into outlaw history. In her introduction she stated her purpose for writing the book:

Historical facts are recounted in this volume, beginning with the first organized gang of outlaws and leading on through the years until the last one was placed behind prison bars. On the part of the officers it tells of splendid moral and personal courage in a Western atmosphere that is true to life.<sup>14</sup>

The book features a picture of her late husband Bill Tilghman on the inside cover. The volume is broken up into several chapters on famous lawmakers in Oklahoma, a history of outlawry in Oklahoma and the most famous gangs and criminals to have lived in the area. The first chapter gives an overview of the lawmen in Oklahoma. She identifies the most famous marshals as William Tilghman, Chris Madsen, and Heck Thomas, also known as the three guardsmen of Oklahoma.<sup>15</sup> Tilghman also included the lives and

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<sup>13</sup> Tilghman, *The Dugout*, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Outlaw Days: A True History of Early- Day Oklahoma Characters* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1926), ii.

<sup>15</sup> "History- The Three Guardsmen of Oklahoma," U.S. Marshals Service, accessed September 26, 2010, <http://www.justice.gov/marshals/history/dalton/three.htm>

accomplishments of Bud Ledbetter and Steve Burke, describing the background and eventful careers of each of the lawmen.<sup>16</sup>

Chapter two of the volume gives an in- depth description of what Tilghman called “outlawry” in Oklahoma. Outlaws fell into two types: individuals from the Oklahoma territory and criminals from the Indian Territory. The area was a hiding place for bad men and women from across the country.<sup>17</sup> She informed the reader as to the history of outlaws from the very beginning of westward expansion to the time the book was published (1925). Within her background, she speculated as to why certain individuals became criminals. What circumstances led to their moral demise? Her answer is that the lawbreakers did what they had to do in order to survive in the new culture of the West. A major portion of the chapter focuses on the U.S. Marshals and their heroic attempts to rid the West of the criminal element. The idealized image of the lawmen is a theme that is repeated throughout her books and articles.<sup>18</sup>

The majority of *Outlaw Days* is dedicated to the most notorious criminal gangs and individuals from Oklahoma history. She gave a history of the outlaws and described their activities. The two gangs featured in *Outlaw Days* were the Dalton Gang and The Doolin gang. The Daltons were the first major gang of criminals in the Oklahoma Territory, consisting of the Younger brothers, Grat Dalton and Emmet Dalton with the leader being Bob Dalton. She detailed their criminal activities, which ranged from robbing trains and banks to the occasional murder. For each member, she explains how

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<sup>16</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 1-19.

<sup>17</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 20-6.

they were either captured or killed. The original manuscript included maps of the famous Coffeerville raid by the Doolin Gang.<sup>19</sup>

The information on the Doolins takes up a majority of the rest of the book. Tilghman's husband was a major force in capturing the outlaws and she used stories told to her by Bill as well as diaries and journals he kept while on the trail of the criminals. Zoe was in possession of his notebooks when she wrote the book, she mentioned them in the introduction. When Zoe and Bill were first married they took their honeymoon at Eureka Springs, where the marshal made the capture of Bill Doolin. The activities of the gang as well as the deaths of various members were catalogued, in story form aided by photographs of individuals from the gang. Tilghman used the death pictures throughout the book. She included the Doolin's association with the famous "Rose of Cimmaron," information which she may have received from Bill as he was supposed to have had contact with her.<sup>20</sup> She divided up the story of the Doolin's into two chapters. The first, provided the activities and history of the gang members; the second is dedicated to the story of how the "brave, heroic" marshals tracked down and captured or killed the majority of the outlaws.<sup>21</sup> "'Honesty is the best policy," used to be written in the copybooks, but there are times when it has to be written in letters of blood. This was the task of the Marshals."<sup>22</sup>

The stories and events that occurred during her marriage to William were crucial in capturing Zoe's interest in outlaw and lawmen history and influencing her to write the books. Tilghman's husband was also involved in capturing another of the criminals

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<sup>19</sup> Manuscript of *Outlaw Days*, folder 11, box 3, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>20</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 47-81.

<sup>21</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 82-103.

<sup>22</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 26.

mentioned in the volume. She dedicated a whole chapter to the Jennings gang.<sup>23</sup> In the personal papers of William Tilghman housed at the Mc Farlin Library on the Tulsa University campus contains a warrant for the arrest of Al Jennings.<sup>24</sup> She continued the storyline by making connections between each of the gangs. The Jennings group was started by Dick West, a surviving member of the Doolins.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Tilghman includes short chapters on Henry and Belle Starr, two of the most famous outlaws in Oklahoma history. *Outlaw Days* did not sell as well as her earlier book. Between July, 1926 and June 1929, she sold twelve copies.<sup>26</sup> Her next article displayed Tilghman's knowledge of horses.

In between *Outlaw Days* and her next book, Tilghman submitted an article to the Kansas State Historical Society. "Quarter Horses and Racing in the Southwest," published in 1928. The article explores some of the most notable bloodlines in Western racing with several valuable horses being descended from two pure bred quarter horses, Cold Deck and Steel Dust. Tilghman also explained to her readers where the breed of animals got the name of quarter horses. At the height of their popularity, the horses were raced in heats that lasted a quarter of a mile. The length was determined by the amount of time the animal sustained a respectable speed. They were known for their endurance in the short races. After the Civil War quarter horses lost most of their popularity as horse racing enthusiasts turned their attention to Eastern racing horses. Tilghman at the end of her article said, "The quarter horse, as a recognized strain, also is nearly extinct. But it has been found that the quarter- horse- thoroughbred cross makes an ideal polo pony."

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<sup>23</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 104-127.

<sup>24</sup> Arrest warrant for Al Jennings, folder 1, box 10, McFarlin Library.

<sup>25</sup> Tilghman, *Outlaw Days*, 104-127.

<sup>26</sup> Royalty Statement, July 1- September 30, 1926, folder 9, box 3, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library; Royalty Statement, folder 11, box 2, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

This revelation had at the time of the article prompted resurgence in the popularity of the quarter horse.<sup>27</sup> Shortly after her article was published, Tilghman gathered her favorite poems to create a comprehensive collection for her readers.

Her next volume of work to be published differed from her earlier works. In 1930, Tilghman published *Prairie Winds* a compilation of original poetry. The majority of the poems featured themes from nature; some referenced Western culture. Many of the pieces were reprints from various magazines and newspapers that she wanted to make easily available to the public. *Prairie Winds* was the only book of poetry published by Tilghman despite a lifelong love affair with the genre. Four years after the volume of poetry came onto the market she tried her hand at writing a different type of book. While teaching at the extension division of the University of Oklahoma, she combined a series of creative writing classes into one work called *The Workmanship of Poetry*. She corresponded with the Houghton Mifflin Company regarding the publication however; the piece was never published.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Tilghman proposed the creation of a family record book to keep up with family history. Soon after she wrote to Doubleday Doran and Co. the idea was rejected.<sup>29</sup> She continued to publish her poems in magazines, newspapers and books as well as featuring her poetry and using her skills with the poetry society that she organized while holding the position as associate editor for *Harlow's Weekly*. Tilghman's expansion into other forms of writing set her apart from the typical

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<sup>27</sup> Zoe Tilghman, "Quarter Horses and Racing in the Southwest," *Kansas State Historical Society*, (1928), 348-351.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Zoe Tilghman to the Houghton Mifflin Company, September 26, 1934, folder 10, box 2, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Zoe Tilghman to Doubleday Doran and Co. June 14, 1935, folder 16, box 3, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library; Letter from Doubleday Doran and Co. to Zoe Tilghman, June 27, 1935, folder 16, box 3, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

women writers of the day. These additional publication ideas helped Tilghman make her mark on Oklahoma's literary history.

*Harlow's Weekly*, founded by Victor Harlow in 1912, printed its first issue on August 17, 1912. The publication covered current events as well as interesting facts about the formation of the state, and after statehood the paper continued to deliver the important news to Oklahomans. The newspaper covered all types of current events including politics, Indian affairs and literary topics.<sup>30</sup> Around the same time that Harlow started *Harlow's Weekly*, he sold his original publishing company, the Harlow-Ratliff Printing Company and founded Harlow Publishing Company which published almost all of Tilghman's books.<sup>31</sup> Throughout her long writing career, she shared a long and successful business relationship with the publishing company. In 1925 she was hired as the literary editor for *Harlow's Weekly*, wrote a column titled "Among Oklahoma's Literary People," about prominent authors from around the state. Additionally, in her capacity as editor she received a steady flow of submissions from Oklahoma, providing encouragement and constructive criticism to contributors. Her position as literary editor gave Tilghman widespread accreditation and contributed to her involvement in community activities. Her reputation as a writer was bolstered by her job at the newspaper and added to her importance within Oklahoma history. She held her job with the newspaper until 1934, when she took a job with the Oklahoma branch of the Works Progress Administration.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, s.v. "Harlow's Weekly," by Tally D. Fugate, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/H/HA025.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, s.v. "Harlow's Weekly," by Tally D. Fugate, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/H/HA025.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Elaine Boylan and Mary Hays Marable *Handbook of Oklahoma Writers* (Norman:University of Oklahoma Press, 1939) 85; Letter from Henry T. Chambers to Zoe Tilghman, October 9, 1930, folder 4, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s Tilghman used two writing services to in order to improve her skills and find a niche for selling her stories. The first was the Simplified Training Course. October 15, 1935, she subscribed to the “practical fiction writing course” where she wrote stories based on specific criteria and received criticism from the administrators of the class. All the submissions and instructions went through the mail. In a letter received the following February, the teacher advised her that her pieces best fit in with magazines such as *Country Gentlemen*, *Country Home*, *Woman’s World*, and *Farmers Wife*. November of 1936, Tilghman was informed by the course instructor that her stories lacked action and she was too verbose and needed to cut her word count.<sup>33</sup>

The second company she used was Comfort Writer’s Service. In the early 1940s, Tilghman was ending her relationship with the Federal Writers Project and needed to know where her stories fit in with the popular writing market. At the beginning, the company suggested that she put her stories in magazines such as *Christian Youth*, *The Friend*, or *Teens*.<sup>34</sup> However; by the middle of 1942 she changed her writing style in order to fit into a different market. In a letter from Comfort’s on June 5, 1942, Tilghman was advised to send her pieces to secondary slick magazines, which published non-violent action pieces. Sanders M. Cummings from the critiquing company suggested that these types of magazines were good starting points. The letter indicated that she did not

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<sup>33</sup> Letter from David Raffelock to Zoe Tilghman, October 15, 1935, folder 20, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library; Letter from David Raffelock to Zoe Tilghman, February 21, 1936, folder 20, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library; Letter from David Raffelock to Zoe A. Tilghman, November 9, 1936, box 20, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Saunders M. Cummings to Zoe Tilghman, January 27, 1942, folder 5, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

like that particular type of publication and was interested in writing more adventure stories.<sup>35</sup>

While the majority of Tilghman's publications were western themed or related to nature, she wrote several stories that offered advice on writing or were purely fictional. The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention denied one of her fictional pieces "An Interrupted Miracle." The story featured a boy who wrote a letter to Santa Claus in order to get money to take his mother to the hospital for eye treatment. Jackie (the boy) goes on a walk at midnight to see the cows and horses down the road. At twelve a.m. he sees a plane crash. He runs home to retrieve his family and together they help the pilot and the passengers. The survivors are grateful and after hearing Jackie's story leave the money the family needs in the boy's stocking.<sup>36</sup> The story was one of the few pieces that had nothing to do with Native Americans, history or Western culture. This piece showed her range within the fictional genre. She tried a little of everything which set her apart from the other writers in Oklahoma and the region. The additional stories also show Tilghman's dedication to making a career out of writing. She experimented with different types of fiction to draw a variety of audiences. An example of an idea Tilghman had for a how to writing book was *If You Try Historical*. The volume was meant to be a guide for writers wanting to venture into the genre of historical fiction. In the handbook, she gives the following advice on chronology, "It is the author's license to shift times a little, but it must be done with judgment."<sup>37</sup> Additionally, she provided tips on how to keep the

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Comfort's Writer's Service to Zoe Tilghman, June 5, 1942, folder 5, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>36</sup> Manuscript of "An Interrupted Miracle," folder 1, box 4, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>37</sup> Manuscript for *If You Try Historical*, folder 26, box 4, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.



timeline in place, how to work with a map, and where to find information on Native Americans.<sup>38</sup>

A few of the other manuscripts found in her collection at Tulsa University include a rendition of the story of Robert Holt Crawford, the jockey who rode the horse Jolly Roger in the Steeplechase race called “A Sport Champion from Oklahoma,” a manuscript of stories told to her by Edmond R. Outler about his experiences on the frontier. The manuscript is titled “Last Victims of Indian Raiders Lie in Unmarked Graves.” Her stories in some ways served to record events from Oklahoma history even if they were written in a more fictional style. Her work adds to her importance within the states’ history because she preserved memories and events. In addition to the stories, Tilghman wrote several plays mostly with Native American themes. One such composition is called “Bride of Morning Star.” The drama follows an Osage girl destined to become a sacrifice to the morning star. The young chief falls in love with her and plans to save her. The chief does not know that the woman guarding her also plans to help her escape. Mayhem and chaos ensue and the wrong girl ends up as a sacrifice. In her play, Tilghman included some Native American chants and songs with authentic music and lyrics.<sup>39</sup> The plot for bride of Morning Star appears in *Mika, the Osage Boy*, one of the children’s books written in the early 1950s. In 1934, she went to work on the Oklahoma Writers Project, a branch of the Works Progress Administration based on her literary talent and work with *Harlow’s Weekly*. Her time with the project was controversial and full of drama.

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<sup>38</sup> Manuscript for *If You Try Historical*, folder 26, box4, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>39</sup> “Bride of Morning Star” manuscript, folder 6, box 4, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

## **Chapter Four: Communists, Poetry and the Oklahoma Writers Project: 1935-1938**

The Works Progress Administration was an interesting solution to the unemployment problem during the depression. Hiring authors, musicians, artists and other members of the arts community provided a unique opportunity to preserve the culture of the late 1930s. Tilghman took her job with the Oklahoma Writers' Project (OWP) seriously and saw the chance to work on some interesting assignments. Her clashes with the directors and other members of the organization over political issues caused problems within the project. Very little of what was produced under Tilghman and William Cunningham, the director, made the final cut into the published guidebook; however, they are still an important part of Oklahoma history. Through her work with the OWP, she used her many skills and personal knowledge of the states' history to write her assignments and edit the work produced by the other employees. Copies of her actual text are not available, but copies of her projects and some instructions give a little insight as to her activities. Her biography of Quanah Parker, published near the end of her time with the project, marked an important step in her career. The book was her first full length Native American novel, and one of her most well researched publications. The volume came the closest to meeting the level of the other women historians in Oklahoma.

In the August 9, 1936 issue of *The Oklahoman* an article titled "Mrs. Tilghman Busy Using Experience," explained a few of the duties Zoe Tilghman was assigned during her time with the Oklahoma Writers' Project, "every day for several months Mrs. Tilghman's conversation has gone something like this, "No, red does not extend that far

east...The Kiowa-Country was not opened until.”<sup>1</sup> During the four years with the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP), Tilghman drew upon her knowledge of the Oklahoma landscape as well as her first-hand knowledge of the founding of the state. Her experience in the Oklahoma literary world added to the skill that she brought to the position of assistant director and later her involvement with the Oklahoma place names project. She was passionate about Oklahoma history and the education of the nation as to its unique history. Additionally, during her time with the project she had a rocky relationship with the director of the project because of conflicting political ideologies. However, despite her battle with two of the directors over communism, the Federal Writers’ Project provided an opportunity for Tilghman to use her vast knowledge of the local area, whether historical, geographical or literary to contribute to a project that’s sole purpose was to educate residents and non-residents about the history of her state.

The FWP in Oklahoma was not without problems. Due to the stressful economic situation brought on by the Great Depression and the increased awareness of poverty and homelessness, the nation saw a rise in socialism and communism. In his book *The Federal Writers’ Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts*, published in 1977, Monty Noam Penkower examined the role that the Federal Writers’ Project had in the lives of artists, writers, librarians, and the other professionals who were employed by the organization.<sup>2</sup> He also discussed the leftist political views that ran rampant among the programs on a national scale. One reason communists found refuge among the projects

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<sup>1</sup> “Mrs. Tilghman Busy Using Experience,” *The Oklahoman* 9 August, 1936, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Muccigrosso, “Review,” *The History Teacher* 11 (August 1978): 605.

was because employment was based solely on performance, leftist leanings did not affect employment opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009, David Taylor's book *Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America*, took a broad look at the lasting effects of the entire Works Progress Administration including the Federal Writers' Project. He examined not only the economic impact that the organization had, but also the social implications that were associated with the creation of the guidebook series. He took a positive view on the guidebook series and stated that the program provided a gateway for future movements such as civil rights and the women's movement. Additionally, he looked at the people behind the books as a way to understand the different cultures in each state, specifically how the variation of people lead to different interpretations in the writings.<sup>4</sup>

In her article "Politics and Art: the Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writer's Project," published in 1990, Mary Ann Slater stated that a struggle occurred between artistic naiveté which she terms "idealism" and the economic and political realities of the times. This struggle was apparent in the programs that fell under the umbrella of Federal One, which included the art, music, and writing programs. Slater theorized that the leftist tendencies that were popular were supported and encouraged by the director William Meredith Cunningham.<sup>5</sup> In the article "William Meredith Cunningham: An Oklahoma Proletarian Novelist," published in 2008, by Larry O'Dell, he agreed with Slater's view of the director. He demonstrated that Cunningham's association and education at

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<sup>3</sup> Monty Noam Penkower, *The Federal Writers Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1977): 181.

<sup>4</sup> David A. Taylor, *Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2009):7.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Slater, "Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):73.

Commonwealth College in Mena, Arkansas, served as evidence to his socialistic or communistic sympathies. In his article O'Dell also explored the conflict that arose between Tilghman and Cunningham over his political affiliations. He stated that Tilghman actively sought his removal based on this and took some radical steps to achieve her goal.<sup>6</sup>

The Federal Writers' Project was started in 1933 by President Franklin Roosevelt as a part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) under the broader picture of the New Deal.<sup>7</sup> The goal of the WPA was to provide work for individuals who had lost their jobs due to the Great Depression caused by the stock market crash. The organization sought to employ from all sectors of society. The WPA is most widely recognized for the construction projects and the civilian conservation corps; however, artists, musicians, writers, librarians, and others affected by the economic situation were also taken into consideration. A secondary goal of the project was to preserve culture and increase the amount of contact that the government had with citizens. In 1935 Federal One was established to address the fine arts section of the population. Under the umbrella of Federal One were the art, music and writers projects which employed white-collar professionals, intellectuals and artists.<sup>8</sup>

The main goal of the FWP was to create a series of guidebooks from almost every state in the country. The books together produced a comprehensive look at the United States and encouraged travelers to stop at carefully selected points. In the process of the

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<sup>6</sup> Larry O'Dell, "William Meredith Cunningham: An Oklahoma Proletarian Novelist," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* (Fall 2008): 322-25.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Ann Slater, "Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):72.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Ann Slater, "Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):73.

trip each guide provided an in depth look at each states history, culture, environment and special characteristics. The projects intended goal was to produce a “contemporary history of the people by the people.”<sup>9</sup> The end result was to be the most comprehensive guide to the United States ever created, and provided the most information in one place without the hassle of doing massive amounts of research at a library or using multiple state books.<sup>10</sup> The Oklahoma guide was no different from the rest of the United States. Other endeavors that the Oklahoma Writers’ Project undertook were the collection of narratives from former slaves which were eventually included in the Western History Collections housed at the University of Oklahoma, and indexing the feature articles from *The Oklahoman* ranging from 1925-1936. The project also resulted in the creation of a database of Oklahoma musicians. The state guidebooks were supposed have a unifying effect to help combat the potential rise of fascism threatening to sweep across Europe.<sup>11</sup>

The result was a five hundred page book titled *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State*, detailing Oklahoma history, culture, flora, fauna and the most important points of interest. The book was not published during Tilghman’s time with the project. The work incorporated every type of information ranging from Native American and white settlement to the unification of the two territories. No discrimination existed between the different culture groups. Accessibility of information to tourists and interested Oklahoma residents was a priority to the participants of the OWP. The guidebook was structured topically starting with a general history including the origin of the name Oklahoma. The guide became progressively more detailed encompassing the entire state. Histories of

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Ann Slater, “Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990): 77.

<sup>10</sup> “Guide to List 500 Pages of State Facts,” *The Oklahoman*, 24 May 1936, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, s.v. “Federal Writers Project,” by Larry O’Dell, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FE005.html>

most towns and cities were included. Additionally, the volume provided a choice of six different tours that lead visitors on a trip around the state guiding tourists to over two hundred points of interest.<sup>12</sup> No social message was to be promoted in the guidebook series; however, due to the economic and social atmosphere of the era, the goal was not possible.<sup>13</sup>

Tilghman, in her position as assistant director to the project edited the work of the OWP employees. She was involved in almost every aspect of the guidebook. She checked for spelling, grammar, and factual errors as well as looking for discrepancies in boundary lines and phonetics. In addition to her editing duties, she worked on projects for the guidebook itself.<sup>14</sup> Her assignments fell into three categories, biographies, Native American topics, and histories of areas, towns and geographical features.<sup>15</sup> Under the category of biographies, Tilghman wrote about famous Oklahomans such as Pawnee Bill, Belle Starr, Roy Cashion the Rough Rider and Stand Waite's capture of a supply train during the Civil War.<sup>16</sup>

For some of these sketches she drew on her past projects. For example she had written about the famous outlaw Belle Starr for her novel *Outlaw Days*. Assignments covering outlaws, Tilghman was to write about the Dalton gang, which Bill helped capture during his days as a marshal.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, she was specifically told not to use Wild West material. Her assignments drew on her literary talents in another way. She was

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<sup>12</sup> "Guide to List 500 Pages of State Facts," *The Oklahoman*, 24 May 1936, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ann Slater, "Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):77.

<sup>14</sup> "Mrs. Tilghman Busy Using Experience," *The Oklahoman*, 9 August 1936, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Assignment slips were not dated.

<sup>16</sup> Assignment Slips, folder 13, box 1, Federal Writers Project Collection, Research Center, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City Oklahoma, Hereafter Known as OHC.

<sup>17</sup> Zoe A. Tilghman, *Outlaw Days: A True History of Early-Day Oklahoma Characters* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1926).

asked to write about George Washington Ogden's book *Sooner Land*, describing the opening of the Cherokee Strip during the land run of 1893. Tilghman used her personal experiences with the land run period to work on this assignment, as she had lived in the Cherokee Strip as a child.<sup>18</sup>

Tilghman dealt with Native American topics in some of her work before the OWP. In addition to her prior research, she had studied the system of phonetics used in many Native American languages and was working on the creation of a Comanche language dictionary. She corresponded with M.W. Sterling from the Department of Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution about the production of the dictionary.<sup>19</sup> The volume was not originally a project under the OWP, and Tilghman campaigned to bring it under the umbrella of the project. She worked with the president of the University of Oklahoma and William K. Ivies to create the Comanche Language Dictionary. Ivies was the linguist in charge of the project. He was called away by the army but kept in contact with her as to the continuance of the project. A language professor from the University of Oklahoma was appointed as the personal supervisor over the project. In a letter to Sterling, Tilghman described some of the field work that was conducted, explaining that the members from the project bought cooperation from the Comanches with ice cream and cigarettes. She said that because of her book on Quanah, she had good standing with the tribe, which helped with their research. She petitioned the Bureau of Ethnology for their backing so that they were able to receive funds from the WPA.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Assignment Slip, folder 13, box 1, Federal Writers Project Collection, OHC.

<sup>19</sup> Questionnaire about Zoe Tilghman, box 8, folder 8, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library ;Letter from Zoe Tilghman to M.W. Sterling, box 1, folder 24, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection McFarlin Library.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Zoe Tilghman to MWS Sterling, folder 24, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.



During her time with the project, she was assigned many topics relating to native culture and history. She was asked to write a sketch pertaining to the Osage Indians, the land allotment of the Miami Indians and of the Comanche. Three of her more interesting native topics included pre-statehood education among the Native Americans, the difficulties between the Creek and Seminole people over the issue of Black Seminoles before the Civil War and the Osage custom of burying scalps with their tribesmen. She was asked specifically to focus on the details of the ceremonies. Additionally, she worked on the history of Tulsa using the founding papers and the histories of several important trails in Oklahoma such as the California and Texas trails.<sup>21</sup>

Outside of her guidebook assignments, Tilghman wrote a manuscript about the founding of Oklahoma City and its history up until 1938, highlighting the accomplishments of the Chamber of Commerce. The manuscript was titled *The Making of a City*. The Chamber of Commerce commissioned her to write the piece on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the city. The volume was never published.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, she was involved in indexing the features for *The Oklahoman*.<sup>23</sup> Her work with the OWP was an important step in achieving her goal of preserving Oklahoma history. She drew on her own memories and experiences to aid her with her guidebook assignments. The project was an interesting part of the states' history and her involvement was an important part of the overall story.

On a national scale, the tough economic times had created an increased awareness of poverty and homelessness, which in turn produced an atmosphere conducive for the

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<sup>21</sup> Assignment Slips, folder 13, box 1, Federal Writers Project Collection, OHC.

<sup>22</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, Federal Writers Project Collection, OHC.

<sup>23</sup> "Guide to List 500 Pages of State Facts," *The Oklahoman*, 24 May 1936, 17.

growth of ideologies such as communism and socialism. An abundance of evidence supporting the correlation between economics and competing ideologies existed within the FWP itself and the negative criticism about the project during the New Deal era up until the present day. Both male and female writers started to adopt leftist views and saw the FWP as a refuge because of the national policies that based employment strictly on performance.<sup>24</sup> The person in charge of hiring the relief workers did not question political beliefs or discriminate against known communists.

Reports of communist activity flooded into the main office at Washington, D.C., that showed the influx of leftist employees into the various projects. The information revealed disputes occurring not only between persons with different political beliefs, but also different factions within the communist party. Additionally, groups with known communist ties associated themselves with projects across the country. A few included the Workers Alliance and Writer's Union's.<sup>25</sup> The Oklahoma branch of the FWP experienced many of the problems that happened on the national scale. Tilghman was a prominent figure in fighting communism in the Oklahoma FWP.

The Oklahoma branch of the organization was started in 1935 after the national director and state officials chose William Meredith Cunningham as the director. Cunningham was a somewhat controversial candidate for the position. Henry Alsberg and the Oklahoma officials did not agree on the appointment of Cunningham at first, the other candidate was A.L. Emery, an attorney, but Emery's only literary credentials included

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Ann Slater, "Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):73; Monty Noam Penkower, *The Federal Writers Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977): 181-2.

<sup>25</sup> Monty Noam Penkower, *The Federal Writers Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977): 181-2.

writing legal briefs. Cunningham was chosen as the director.<sup>26</sup> His background included teaching English at the University of Oklahoma and publishing several novels, his most famous being *Green Corn Rebellion* which focused on the plight of the tenant farmers during the rebellion. His book takes a sympathetic view to the socialist farmers affected during the time period.<sup>27</sup> Cunningham was a controversial candidate because he was known to have leftist political views and had taught at Commonwealth Labor College in Mena, Arkansas, which had ties to communist politics. While at the institution he taught courses such as writing and Marxian economics.<sup>28</sup> Under the direction of Cunningham the project started several projects however, almost all were never finished.<sup>29</sup>

Oklahoma had socialist roots that extended back into the early twentieth century and grew in intensity during the first of two major red scares during the 1930s. During the time period that the OWP was active communist leaders ran for office and attempted to control many organizations such as the Workers Alliance. Within the writers project one major communist leader, Fred Maxham, shared a brief relationship with the organization.<sup>30</sup> Oklahoma produced an ideal atmosphere for the growth of leftist political views because of the largely agricultural economy, which in turn allowed for a greater poverty rate during the depression. As a result of Cunningham's appointment, other writers with leftist views such as Lois L'Amour and Jim Thompson were attracted to the OWP. The project offered a chance for writers and artists to connect to the larger

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Ann Slater, "Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):73-75.

<sup>27</sup> Larry O'Dell, "William Meredith Cunningham: An Oklahoma Proletarian Novelist," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 86 (Fall 2008): 321.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Ann Slater, "Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):74-5.

<sup>29</sup> *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, s.v. "Federal Writers Project," by Larry O'Dell, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FE005.html>.

<sup>30</sup> *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, s.v. "Communist Party," by Larry O'Dell, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/c/co40.html> (accessed 24 February 2010).

population through their writing.<sup>31</sup> Tilghman, during her time at the OWP came into conflict with Cunningham and the leftist writers because of their differing political views. She was fiercely opposed to communism and felt antagonism towards Cunningham because she believed he was the progenitor of the communist infiltration.

From the beginning Tilghman and Cunningham had a tumultuous relationship. During her time with the OWP her aggravation with the “infiltration” of communists into the project hit a climax. She reached out to Senator Martian Dies head of the Dies Committee, which was later known as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). The primary purpose of the group was to travel around the United States to seek out and prosecute known or suspected communists. Few individuals before her had wanted contact with the committee. She invited the Dies committee to come and investigate the OWP because of the abundance of leftist employees. In a seven page statement, Tilghman listed in detail the activities that the core group of communists were performing and how they were adversely affecting not only the production of the guidebook and other OWP projects but the work of the other employees as well.<sup>32</sup>

In her statement, Tilghman explained her concerns about the leftist group of OWP employees. Among her reasons for inviting HUAC, she stated that the better paying positions in the organization went to the individuals who displayed sympathetic political views with the core group of communists. Along the same line, she also accused Cunningham of rewarding employees who were willing to become leftists with new or better positions. She gave a specific example, Cunningham’s “secretary” Alta Churchill

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<sup>31</sup> Mary Ann Slater, “Politics and Art: The Controversial Birth of the Oklahoma Writers Project,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990):73-4.

<sup>32</sup> Seven Page Statement by Zoe Tilghman, box 1, folder 5 Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

was promoted to the position of head reporter, which according to Tilghman, did not actually exist. She puts forth the theory that the director promoted his secretary because of her political views. She stated that Churchill took a vacation that coincided with the national Communist convention in New York. Cunningham's secretary also was encouraged by the director, to make a trip to Commonwealth College, which she did.

Additionally, she accused Cunningham and radical professors from the University of Oklahoma of organizing a group with communist ties such as the Southwest Writers Group and the League of American Authors.<sup>33</sup> Tilghman was particularly irritated about where Cunningham and the other leftist employees' money were going. She accused them of sending money to the loyalists in Spain and other causes. In her statement she said "their other activities have been outside the project and they are within their rights in carrying them on. Nevertheless, the money paid them by the U.S. is being used to support them in their communistic work." Employees from around the country shared the same complaints. The project in Philadelphia was specifically mentioned for allowing the Worker's Alliance to place workers on the project to solicit funds for the Spanish loyalists as well as picketing and posting notices without permission. No punishment was provided for the infractions.<sup>34</sup>

Also, in her letter to Senator Dies, Tilghman detailed Cunningham's attempts to unionize the OWP and indoctrinate employees as to communist ideology through mandatory classes. She stated that the union failed due to lack of interest combined with the radical constitution that he tried to introduce. The document was the death of the

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<sup>33</sup> Letter from Zoe Tilghman to Martian Dies, box 1, folder 5, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>34</sup> Penkower, 183.

union within the organization.<sup>35</sup> Tilghman was not the only employee to complain about the communist infiltration of the project. Several other statements exist as to the activities that occurred in the OWP. One statement titled “shall we pay taxes to hire communists” suggests that all employees of the Federal Writers Project take loyalty oaths, another reinforces Tilghman’s accusations that communists or individuals who shared his leftist political views were favored under the leadership of Cunningham.<sup>36</sup>

Tilghman stated her reasons for writing as being honorable. She specifically said that she wrote not out of jealousy. She contacted Senator Dies because she was worried about the integrity of the project as well as the well-being of the non-communist employees who worked within the organization. According to Tilghman, Cunningham threatened the entire project by implying that if the workers were unable to keep up with the rate of production the OWP faced closure. She closed the statement with the assurance that she was a loyal American who was looking out for her fellow countrymen and doing her part to keep the OWP a clean, American undertaking.<sup>37</sup>

In 1938, Cunningham resigned from his post as director of the OWP and recommended that Jim Thompson, a fellow comrade, be appointed to the post. His suggestion irked Tilghman who believed she was to be appointed.<sup>38</sup> A year later the project was shut down due to funding problems and when it restarted, Tilghman lost her position as assistant director. She resented the decision, and wrote a letter to Ron Stephens, the state director of the project, and explained that she had been removed

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Zoe Tilghman to Martian Dies, box 1, folder 5, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections; Statement on the Federal Writers Project, box 1, folder 5, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>36</sup> “Shall We Pay Taxes to Hire Communists?” box 1, folder 5, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Zoe Tilghman to Martian Dies, box 1, folder 5, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>38</sup> O’Dell, “Cunningham,” 324.

unfairly under Cunningham and deserved a full time job on the project. Stephens in turn wrote a letter to Henry Alsberg the national director that informed him of the situation. The result was that Tilghman was found to be right and when a full time job became available that she be contacted and offered the position.<sup>39</sup>

In the interim, she was offered a job working on the origins of names project. The arrangement required a lot of travel and she requested that a time limit be placed on her involvement with the project. She also asked to be returned to the Oklahoma project after the expiration of the time limit.<sup>40</sup> During her time with the place- names project Tilghman investigated the origins of names all over the state. Examples included Sallisaw, Pawhuska, and Ochelata.<sup>41</sup> April through August of 1940 she wrote a series of articles for *The Oklahoman* concerning the origin of place names. In the pieces, she explored the origins of specific towns or geographic features throughout Oklahoma.<sup>42</sup> The column that appeared in the newspaper on April 28, 1940, Tilghman looked at Carleton in Blaine County, Boomer Creek, Anthon in Custer County, and Cee Gee. She detailed the discovery or founding and identified the names of the people or tribe who named the town or feature.<sup>43</sup> When the OWP was closed down due to funding problems and when it reopened, Tilghman was not rehired to the project, instead another woman writer and historian Angie Debo, was appointed as director of the organization.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Letter from Ron Stephens to Henry Alsberg, box 1, folder 20, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collection; Letter from James M. Thompson to Henry Alsberg, box 1, folder 1, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Ron Stephens to Henry Alsberg, box 1, folder 20, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections; Letter from Jim Thompson to Henry Alsberg, box 1, folder 20, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>41</sup> Assignment Slips, box 1, folder 13-14, Federal Writers Project, OHC.

<sup>42</sup> The place names columns were not specifically mentioned in cooperation with the OWP, however they appear at the correct time period.

<sup>43</sup> Zoe A. Tilghman, "Oklahoma Place Names," *The Oklahoman*, 28 April 1940, 13.

<sup>44</sup> O'Dell, "Cunningham," 325.

In her capacity as assistant director to the Oklahoma Writers Project, she employed her extensive knowledge of Oklahoma history, culture and environment as well as her vast experience in the literary world. She combined her passions for education and Oklahoma history to provide the readers of the guidebook with an accurate and entertaining look at the state as well as sparking interest in the state that she loved. Her antagonistic relationship with the director Cunningham characterized the feeling of the times. The economic and social atmosphere provided a perfect environment for socialism and communism to grow. The Federal Writers Project created an opportunity for writers and artists to share their feelings and ideas with the general population. Tilghman took advantage of the chance to help share the unique and special history of Oklahoma with the nation as well as the citizens of the state.

In 1938, Tilghman published the first of her two biographies, *Quanah, Eagle of the Comanches*. The book was the first full length Native American novel written by Tilghman, as well as one of her more well-researched books.<sup>45</sup> The volume describes the kidnapping of Cynthia Ann Parker from her family farm in Texas and her subsequent life in the Comanche camp. For the majority of the book, Tilghman focused on the life of the Comanche chief Quanah. She described his various accomplishments and life working with the White men to try and come to agreeable terms about land and peace between the two cultures. The book reads more like a novel than a history account because of the use of dialogue and poetic descriptions of the land and people to make a realistic picture. In some cases she used footnotes to indicate where she learned a specific fact or to clarify the meaning of a Comanche word. In her book, Tilghman also incorporated sepia colored

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<sup>45</sup> Tilghman published *Quanah* at the same time she was working on the Comanche Language dictionary with the Oklahoma Writers Project.



sketches done by Phoebe Ann White to bring a more realistic element to her story. Despite the fictional feel to the book, she researched her topic and made use of the relatives of Quanah who were still living at the time. The work listed members of Quanah's family and helped set out the chronology of the events surrounding the Native American's life.<sup>46</sup>

In her forward, Tilghman comments on some of the sources of her research material. She gives an explanation as to why the book, early on has a more fictional feel than the rest of the story. "However, it has been necessary, especially in the earlier part, to reconstruct the story from the little that was known..." She stated that she used historical material "supplemented by personal study of the terrain, and by stories told me by William M. (Bill) Tilghman." She also mentions Reverend White Parker, the son of Quanah, "who read and corrected the manuscript." She worked closely with the members of Quanah's family to make sure that the picture of Quanah she portrayed was as accurate as possible. Tilghman consulted William K. Ivies, with whom she had worked with on the Comanche language dictionary as to the correct phonetics and intricacies of the language.<sup>47</sup> The advertisement for *Quanah* bills the book as a historically accurate adventure. The flyer for the novel expounds on Tilghman's literary talents. "She very broadly sees logic in all the movements of the period and makes it seem reasonable." "Mrs. Tilghman's book details Indian customs, religious beliefs, and the essential poetry

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<sup>46</sup> Gaston L. Litton, "Review," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 17 (March 1939): 107-108.

<sup>47</sup> Zoe A. Tilghman, *Quanah, Eagle of the Comanches*, (Oklahoma City: Harlows Publishing Company, 1938), v-vi.

of Indian thought.”<sup>48</sup> The front of the pamphlet features a Native American in full dress, with a caption that describes war and death.

In March 1939, Gaston L. Litton wrote a positive review of *Quanah*. He reiterated the fact that Tilghman gathered her information from the scanty amount of official records that existed about Quanah and his actions. Litton states that Tilghman’s “prose is poetic at times” as she describes the Oklahoma countryside. However, unlike her other books, *Quanah* is supported with documented evidence and the reviewer says that the author’s book contributes greatly to the history of the region and to the information available about Quanah.<sup>49</sup>

The OWP served as a great opportunity for Tilghman to expound on the history of Oklahoma. Despite her problems with multiple directors of the project, she was still able to contribute to the creation of the guidebook and other endeavors. While working with the project, Tilghman was able to do fieldwork with the local Comanche tribe as to the creation of a dictionary. Her work with the Native Americans coincided with the release of Tilghman’s biography on Quanah Parker. The book was the first of Tilghman’s two biographies and her first full length Native American novel. Her episode with the writers’ project showcased Tilghman’s importance within Oklahoma history because she worked to preserve history through the guidebook assignments and fought against the influx of communism during the first of two “red scares” in United States history. From her job on the OWP Tilghman continued to teach and write several books including the long awaited biography of her husband.

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<sup>48</sup> Advertisement for *Quanah*, folder 17, box 4, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collections.

<sup>49</sup> Gaston L. Litton, “Review,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 17 (March 1939): 107-108.

### Chapter Five: Children's Books, the Life of Bill and Conclusion: 1935-1964

The last twenty years of Tilghman's life were the busiest. She produced at least ten books and three articles along with travelling to Hollywood in order to lend her abilities to the popular television show *Death Valley Days*. At this point in her life she had graduated from college and returned to teaching. In 1949, she published the biography of her husband that showcased not only her undying dedication to him, but her shortcomings as a serious historical writer. Basing her writing off stories told to her by Bill and on her own personal experiences attracted criticism as to the academic quality of her work. Despite the negative comments about her lack of tangible sources, Tilghman was preserving the memories of both Bill and herself through her writings which was important in the long run. By the time she passed away in 1964, she had managed a successful literary career and a name for herself among popular fiction writers in Oklahoma, even if that fame was short-lived.

Shortly after her dismissal from the Oklahoma Writers project Tilghman published two articles with the journal for the American Anthropological Society. "Source of the Buffalo Origin Legend" and "Origin of the Name *Wichita*" appeared in the July-September issue of *American Anthropologist*. The first piece examines several different legends explaining where the buffalo originated each spring. Tilghman stated that the Plains tribes believed the buffalo were created underground, though not in an underworld, and sent up to the earth for the express purpose of feeding and clothing the people who lived there. The buffalo were supposed to emerge each spring from several holes in the ground, which the author speculated was actually a hidden canyon deep within the area's mountain range. In order to provide evidence for her theory she used a

story told to her by her late husband William Tilghman. He had personal knowledge of the region and had seen the canyon which she described in her article. Tilghman explained that these legends had been recorded previously by Col. Richard I. Dodge in his book *Our Wild Indians*. In her article Tilghman also gave an explanation as to why the Native Americans believed that the buffalo emerged from a place beneath the earth's surface. Each winter when the tribes had migrated to their winter camps, the buffalo made their way to the secluded canyon to wait out the winter. When the weather warmed up enough for the buffalo to emerge, the Indians had moved back to their summer encampments and witnessed the animals coming out of "holes" in the ground.<sup>1</sup>

The second piece featured in the journal was slightly more controversial. In "The Origin of the Name *Wichita*" Tilghman examined where the name Wichita originated. She drew on her knowledge of phonetics and her work previously with Native American languages. She began the article by stating that "no positive origin has been learned for the name of the Wichita Indians."<sup>2</sup> She follows that statement by explaining some of the history of the region and the natives who lived there originally. The group living in the Wichita area were originally from a spot between the Red River and the Washita River, but were displaced by the government. They ended up along the Arkansas and Canadian river but still hunted as far west as the Red River. According to Tilghman, the name Wichita was attached to the group of Native Americans after Lieutenant W. Seawell, acting as secretary for a military council referred to the group as the *Wichetaw* in the council minutes. The name stuck with them through the present day. In her article, she

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<sup>1</sup> Zoe Tilghman, "Source of the Buffalo Origin Legend," *American Anthropologist*, 43 (July-September, 1941): 487-488.

<sup>2</sup> Zoe Tilghman, "Origin of the Name Wichita," *American Anthropologist* 43 (July-September 1941): 487-488.

also explains what the name means in the Creek or Muskogee language from which she believed the word was derived. She puts forth the theory that Wichita is a combination of two words *We-wo-ka*, meaning barking water and *Cha-te*, meaning red water. The two together form *We-Chate* which translated to red water. The name was directly connected with the geographic region in which the tribe lived and hunted. At the end of her article Tilghman said, "Historical and linguistic data harmonize, and I present this as the origin of the tribal name *Wichita*."<sup>3</sup> In her article she does list two of her references as being the Georgia Historical Collections and *Journal of the Commissioners*.<sup>4</sup> The work is one of the few examples where Tilghman gives any indication as to where she found her information.

In the January- March 1942 edition of *American Anthropologist*, Mary R. Haas wrote an article criticizing Tilghman's theory about the origins of the name Wichita. She disputed Tilghman's claims that the name came into use in 1835, citing several sources that show the name Wichita in use as early as 1719, almost a century before the council secretary was supposed to have cemented the name in history. She also contradicted Tilghman on the fact that the word was derived from the Creek language, stating that the Creek people never referred to the Wichita's as the "Red River People." Haas cites several sources and describes in detail what she believed to be factual and phonetic errors. This review is an example of why other historians and anthropologists viewed Tilghman's work as less than scholarly. The two articles in the anthropology journal

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<sup>3</sup> Zoe Tilghman, "Origin of the Name Wichita," *American Anthropologist* 43 (July-September 1941): 487-488.

<sup>4</sup> Zoe Tilghman, "Origin of the Name Wichita," *American Anthropologist* 43 (July-September 1941): 487-488.

were the last articles she wrote for a span of time. Her next big accomplishment was the long awaited biography of her famous husband.

From the time that Bill was killed in 1924, Tilghman received requests to write the biography. Friends and admirers of the marshal wrote to her and shared stories they had either seen or heard about the man.<sup>5</sup> In 1949, *Marshal of the Last Frontier: Life and Services of William Matthew Tilghman, For 50 Years One of the Greatest Peace Officers of the West* was published by A.H. Clark out of Glendale, California, as a part of the Western Frontiersmen Series. In the preface Tilghman said “During the twenty four years since an assassin’s bullet ended his life, the knowledge that I must write his story has always been with me.”<sup>6</sup> The biography was the first of Tilghman’s works that had not been published by Harlow’s. A chronology and list of photographs are included in the front of the book in order to aid the reader in following the story.

The volume is divided up into five sections. The first, titled “Preludes” follows the Tilghman genealogy through American history and examines Bill’s early life on the family farm in Kansas. Zoe covered the most important events of his early life that influenced him. She details how he first learned how to shoot a gun, and the hours of practice that were needed in order for him to gain the skill that earned him his nickname of “two gun.” In the last part of the section, Tilghman followed Bill on his first adventure to the frontier at the age of 16. He and a few friends packed up a wagon and went out to the buffalo range to test their skills. This event coincided with his first encounter with the Indians of the region. Section two called “The Last Frontier” begins when Bill was a little

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from George W. Bolds to Zoe Tilghman, folder 1, box 1, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>6</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Marshal of the Last Frontier: Life and Services of William Matthew Tilghman, For 50 Years One of the Greatest Peace Officers of the West*, (Glendale: A.H. Clark Co., 1949): 14.

older and goes off on his own. Tilghman detailed his experiences with buffalo hunting, and more encounters with the Native Americans. She also spent a lot of the section on Bill's early time at Dodge City. The town became an important place for her husband in terms of his law enforcement career.<sup>7</sup>

Section three of the book was titled "Servant of the Law." This part took up the majority of the pages in the volume. For most of the readers this was the most important part of Bill's life and accounted for his fame that has persisted to the present day. In this part of the book, Tilghman was intent on keeping her husband's image as that of a hero. She included his accomplishments, but failed to mention if he ever failed at a mission he was assigned, giving the reader the impression that he could do no wrong. She defended his reputation when on occasion a newspaper or magazine printed a fact that she felt to be untrue. Her complete dedication to Bill can be seen throughout her books, no more than in *Marshal of the Last Frontier*, where she depicted him as the savior of the West.<sup>8</sup>

In part four, Tilghman examined the events that led up to the moment when at the age of twenty-three, Bill became a law enforcement officer. She follows his career through his time at Dodge City first as a lawman and then as the city marshal. During this time he married his first wife Flora Kendall and had two children Charles and Dot. The section includes the time when he moved his family to a plot in newly opened Oklahoma near the city of Chandler. The city became his home until he was called upon to go to Oklahoma City. During this time Bill became a deputy U.S. Marshal. Part four also includes four chapters dedicated to the Doolin gang and Bill's involvement in tracking

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<sup>7</sup> Tilghman, *Marshal of the Last Frontier*, 19-135.

<sup>8</sup> Tilghman, *Marshal of the Last Frontier*, 135-192.

down and imprisoning the members of the gang. At the very end of the section, Bill settles down and becomes the sheriff of Lincoln County.<sup>9</sup>

Section five called “No Rusted Sword” finds an older Bill, now married to his second wife Zoe and settled down in Chandler, Oklahoma. She detailed his time as a private citizen when he trained race horses, a passion that both he and Zoe shared. However, he did not stay in retirement long and was called upon to serve as chief of police for Oklahoma City. He packed up his family and moved them to the city. He did not return to Chandler until he was buried there. In 1912, Bill was finally awarded the title of full U.S. Marshal, having been a deputy for all those years. During the last twelve years of his life, Zoe followed him through the creation of his movie *The Outlaws*. He toured around the country with it leaving his family behind for much of that time. His last commission as a U.S. Marshal was to go to Cromwell, Oklahoma, and help “clean it up.” There he came into contact with a corrupt prohibition officer, Wiley Lynn who shot and killed Bill in 1924. Lynn went to trial but was acquitted. Tilghman lists Lynn’s arrest record after he was cleared of Bill’s murder to illustrate why he should have been found guilty of the marshals murder.<sup>10</sup>

In the preface, Tilghman explains where her facts come from and the sources that she used in the book.

I have made extensive studies of the area and period covered, including research in the collections of the historical societies of Kansas and Oklahoma; but the greater portion of this book is based upon original personal, and hitherto unpublished, matter. The most important source of information concerning the earlier years is furnished by Bill himself, in his notebooks and in unpublished memoirs written a few months before his death.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tilghman, *Marshal of the Last Frontier*, 192-269.

<sup>10</sup> Tilghman, *Marshal of the Last Frontier*, 374.

<sup>11</sup> Tilghman, *Marshal of the Last Frontier*, iv.



The lack of tangible source material is one of the most common critiques of Tilghman's work. She rarely used footnotes or end notes to explain where she found her facts. In searching through her personal papers, she did a lot of her research through corresponding with individuals and organizations. For example in 1959, Zoe wrote to the Executive Office for the United States Marshals asking various questions about regulations for marshals between 1872 and 1888. She requested information about appointments, oaths and payments. The following year she published her book on Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp.<sup>12</sup>

Tilghman's book on Bill received some attention from the newspapers and reviewers. A newspaper article in *The Oklahoman* titled "Pioneer Peace Officer's Widow Finishing Book," stated "by turning her head to the right Zoe Tilghman can see another picture of her famous frontiersmen husband William Matthew "Bill" Tilghman."<sup>13</sup> The book was written during the fifty second anniversary of the shooting of Bill Doolin. The article relates that Tilghman's most prized possession was Bill's old buffalo gun that he had repaired several times over the years. The article demonstrated her dedication to her late husband and offers supporting evidence to the claims made by Rupert N. Richardson in his review of the book.

In a review of her biography on the marshal, Richardson said "one does not expect a work written under such conditions to be objective: and certainly this book is not definitive...the story of a worthy man written by the one who knew him best of all"<sup>14</sup> The conditions that Richardson referred to were the lack of tangible sources. The reviewer

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<sup>12</sup> Letter to Zoe Tilghman from E.J. Malchett, folder 6, box 2, Zoe A. Tilghman Collection, McFarlin Library.

<sup>13</sup> "Pioneer Peace Officer's Widow Finishing Book," *The Oklahoman*, August 1, 1948, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Rupert N. Richardson, "Review," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 36 (March 1950): 729-730.

notes that most of the information that Tilghman used in her book was based on recollections that her husband had recounted to her about events that had happened decades before. Additionally, he discounts the biography as a serious work, stating that the book was a “labor of love” written by a devoted wife. While the volume is an important work in terms of literature of the West, *Marshal of the Last Frontier* is not a scholarly work.<sup>15</sup> Her biography of Bill may not display the more disciplined writing of her contemporary historians, but in writing Bill’s story using his notes and memoirs, she allowed the public to share his story as remembered by him. After finishing the biography of her husband, Tilghman took a brief break until 1953 when she published the first in a series of children’s books on Native Americans.

The series is made up of six different books featuring individuals from tribes located across the country. The books were targeted for grades four through six, but are easily accessible for all age groups. For the first book, Tilghman sent her readers clear across the country to Virginia to follow the tale of Kiptah, a member of the Powhatan tribe in *A Boy of the Powhatans*. The story takes place during the time when the English first settled in Virginia and made contact with the Native Americans. Kiptah, the main character comes into contact with the white settlers when they approached his village to speak with the chief.<sup>16</sup> The English took Kiptah with them to their camp to show him their culture. In return they left one of their own men in the Powhatan village. The story tells of the clashes between the cultures and the problems that they faced in trying to live in such close proximity. Kiptah is fascinated by how the white settlers look and act. He realizes that the English ways are appropriate for the way they live, but his own people

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<sup>15</sup> Rupert N. Richardson, “Review,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 36 (March 1950): 729-730.

<sup>16</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *A Boy of the Powhatans* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1955), 1-37.

need to keep to their traditional culture in order to survive as they have for centuries.<sup>17</sup> “We will go to keep our Indian way of life... the English are not bad, but their way is different, and ours cannot stand against it. We might learn that way. But no. We are Indian and our way is best for us.”<sup>18</sup> The famous individuals from the time and region such as John Smith, Pocahontas and John Rolfe are featured in the book.<sup>19</sup>

The second volume in the series is titled *Maiom: The Cheyenne Girl*. The story follows the life of Maiom, of the Cheyenne tribe living around the present location of Denver, Colorado. Tilghman interspersed the story with traditional legends from the Cheyenne. Through Maiom’s story the readers, learn how life in a traditional camp may have been. The main character is captured by the enemy tribe; the Pawnees but manages to escape.<sup>20</sup> After returning home, she works alongside her mother to learn the skills that she will need as a wife. She marries Wolf Runner, a friend of her brother and an eagle hunter and has a happy family.<sup>21</sup> Towards the end of the book, the Cheyenne’s encounter the white settlers that are moving westward and into Mexico. Along with the encroaching white settlement, the Cheyenne face raids from their traditional enemies, the Pawnee’s. In 1849, Maiom’s tribe was moved east to Kansas and settled on a reservation. Eventually they were moved to reservations in Oklahoma near Fort Reno. At the end Maiom dies and the Cheyenne’s give her a traditional burial.<sup>22</sup>

*Katska of the Seminoles* is third. The book follows the same format as *A Boy of the Powhatans*. The story features Katska a member of the Seminole tribe and their

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<sup>17</sup> Tilghman, *Powhatan*, 152-159.

<sup>18</sup> Tilghman, *Powhatan*, 158.

<sup>19</sup> Tilghman, *Powhatan*, 123-133.

<sup>20</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Maiom, The Cheyenne Girl* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1956), 17-24.

<sup>21</sup> Tilghman, *Maiom*, 74-85.

<sup>22</sup> Tilghman, *Maiom*, 135-159.

conflicts with not only other Native American tribes from Florida but also the influx of white settlers to the area. Tilghman included Osceola and his involvement in the regions interesting history. Katska has personal contact with the famous Seminole and allows the readers to get first-hand knowledge of Osceola's adventures.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the story, the theme of fighting removal to Indian Territory is present. The last part of the volume describes Katska's arrival and life on a reservation in the Indian Territory. During his time there, he learns about several different tribes that have been moved to the reservations. Tilghman included Cherokee's and Comanche's. She gave her readers a little bit of history about each including the civil war between the Cherokee's and the skill of the Comanche's with a bow and arrow.<sup>24</sup>

Volume four is titled *Nanek, Friend of Little Turtle* and takes place to the North of Oklahoma in Ohio and Indiana. Again the common theme running through the series of children's books is the struggle between the white settlers and the Native Americans. The clash of cultures, ideas on private property and the meaning of civilization are prominent themes in each of Tilghman's books. Nanek, fights the idea of conforming to the English practices of farming and confining themselves to one plot of land in order to feed their families. The tale is set during the late 1700's. Nanek and his siblings live with a Miami tribe under the leadership of Little Turtle. The chief tells the main character about his time in Montreal with the French fur trappers and his experiences during the Revolutionary War. Tilghman was able to work in some general American history

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<sup>23</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Katska of the Seminoles* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1956), 1-91.

<sup>24</sup> Tilghman, *Katska*, 97-167.

through Little Turtle's stories.<sup>25</sup> In the end Little Turtle and Nanek end up being displaced by the white settlers.<sup>26</sup>

The fifth in the series is *Sacajawea, the Shoshoni*. The book tells the story of one of the most famous Native American women in United States history. The volume gives an account of Sacajawea's childhood with the Shoshoni and her subsequent capture by the Sioux. Tilghman followed the main character through her marriage to a French trapper-trader Charbonneau and her journey across the country with Louis and Clark. Sacajawea loved to travel and spent a great deal of her life wandering across the West.<sup>27</sup> She moved to St. Louis after Merriweather Louis wrote to her husband and invited them to come to Missouri so her son Baptiste could attend a school run by white men. Towards the end of her life, Sacajawea left her husband and went to live with the Comanche tribe. There she met and married her second husband. Tilghman describes Sacajawea's long and eventful life, highlighting her proximity to some of the most influential events in American history. She witnessed the Mormon's moving West towards Utah and saw the first railroad and telegraphs being built and traveled to California. Tilghman made sure that her readers understood the importance of Sacajawea's life and accomplishments.<sup>28</sup>

The sixth and last volume in the children's series is *Mika, the Osage Boy*. The story follows Mika through his early childhood. Through the first few chapters Tilghman's readers get a good sense of the customs and traditions of the Osage people. Mika participated in the morning prayers and rituals. Tilghman gave an example of some

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<sup>25</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Nanek, Friend of Little Turtle* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1956.), 1-70.

<sup>26</sup> Tilghman, *Nanek*, 70-191.

<sup>27</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Sacajawea, the Shoshoni* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1958.), 12-64.

<sup>28</sup> Tilghman, *Sacajawea*, 64-156.

lessons Mika received from his parents on etiquette.<sup>29</sup> As Mika grew older, he turned into a great warrior and married a half-white girl named Snow Flower. The main character fights in many battles against the Osage enemies such as the Pawnees, Comanche's and Kiowa's.<sup>30</sup> Mika witnesses the travellers going to West on the Santa Fe Trail and the Civil War between the North and South. In the last chapter, Mika visits Washington and has a chance to meet Abraham Lincoln. This volume differs from the previous books slightly because the Osage's adapt to the white settlers way of living instead of fighting against it. Mika's family practices Christianity and the Osage children attend the white schools.<sup>31</sup> An article in *The Oklahoman* described the book as "a sad little story, as any authentic account of a vanishing way of life must be, it is filled with great beauty too."<sup>32</sup> In the series, she manages to cover a lot of American history through the various stories.

Around the time when Tilghman was beginning to write the Native American children's books, she produced two volumes aimed at educating children about the history of Oklahoma in an entertaining manner. In a message to her audience Tilghman gives some insight as to her motives for writing the books. "It was through stories that my interest in history began at the age of eight. They were presented in a haphazard manner, with no intent other than entertainment. But the results have encouraged me to believe that it is a sound and helpful method. I trust that this book, written in that belief may prove its value."<sup>33</sup> *Stories of Oklahoma* and *Oklahoma Stories* begin with the appearance of the Spanish explorers such as Cabeza de Vaca and Panfilo Narvaez. The first of the two books includes the timespan from 1536 up until the end of the Civil War

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<sup>29</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Mika, the Osage Boy* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1960), 1-23.

<sup>30</sup> Tilghman, *Mika*, 79-137.

<sup>31</sup> Tilghman, *Mika*, 189-202.

<sup>32</sup> "Books in Orbit," *The Oklahoman*, June 12, 1960, 95.

<sup>33</sup> Zoe Tilghman, *Stories of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1955), iv.

in 1865. She focuses mainly on the Indian involvement with the various explorers and white settlers. Tilghman makes sure to include the major events that influenced United States history such as the Louisiana Purchase, Indian removal and the Cherokee civil war. In order to make the publications more kid friendly, she introduced some main characters that the readers can follow throughout the books. An example is: O-poth-le Ya-ho-la in the early 1800s. She made an effort to cover all the different tribes that make up Oklahoma. She mentioned the Osage, Cherokee, Creek, Kiowa and Wichita. She also explained Indian boarding schools and other attempts by the white settlers to integrate Native Americans into white society.<sup>34</sup>

The second book *Oklahoma Stories* begins where *Stories of Oklahoma* leaves off at the year 1866 and continuing on through to statehood in 1907. Tilghman followed the timeline through some of the most important events in the state's history. She covers the Medicine Lodge treaty, Battle of Washita, Battle of Adobe Walls, the land runs, cattle drives, the opening of the Cherokee Strip and the actual event of statehood. At the end of the book she provided a glossary and an index to help the reader. In both volumes Tilghman added additional material that gave ideas as to educational activities for students such as mapping important sites and doing additional research into events and people. Additionally, maps and illustrations guide the reader through their journey through history. Tilghman produced the children's stories at the same time that she was herself teaching young children. She had a lifelong passion for teaching young children. One of her goals was to educate the state of Oklahoma about their heritage both white and Indian.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tilghman, *Oklahoma Stories*, (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1955),1-230.

<sup>35</sup> Tilghman, *Stories of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, n1955), 1-230.

Five years later, Tilghman's last piece was published in *Oklahoma Today*. "A Bed for God" follows the story of the famous ghost dance performed by several Native American tribes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century during the tumultuous time of removal. Tilghman painted a picture of an atmosphere filled with tension and uncertainty as the white settlers watched and waited for war to erupt and the Native Americans waited for their prayers to be answered. In her work the reader can easily see the clash between the two cultures and the misunderstandings that led to bloodshed over the years. Tilghman uses the tension between the two groups as a theme throughout her writings, especially in her children's books. The story was so named because an elderly woman had a vision of a new bed with "fine covers." The leaders decided that a bed was needed for their Great Spirit. The bed was never used. A few weeks later the Ghost Dance was stopped for good and the item was reclaimed by nature. At the beginning of the piece, the editor of the magazine included a eulogy to Tilghman.<sup>36</sup>

Zoe Tilghman, pioneer of Oklahoma, educator, and writer contributed greatly to the literary landscape of Oklahoma as well as to the education of the American people to the unique history of her state. She started her literary career early with a few magazine articles and pieces in literary journals. After the death of her much loved husband she turned to writing books. Her publications featured all the things that she loved most: outlaw history, heroic lawmen, Native American culture, ethnography and language. For her time Tilghman was fairly typical. She focused on more anthropological aspects of history and studied history for a short time at the University of Oklahoma. She fell behind her contemporaries in terms of formal training and field work. Her writings have a more fictional feel to them and fail to live up to the scholarly works of other female writers in

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<sup>36</sup> Zoe Tilghman, "A Bed for God," *Oklahoma Today* (Spring 1965), 27-29.



Oklahoma such as Angie Debo and Muriel Wright. She was unique in the fact that she moved with the times, and did not restrict herself to books and articles. Tilghman branched out into movies, radio, ballet, song and poetry. She worked with producers in Hollywood to add an element of realism to some of their productions as well as lending her writing abilities to one episode of *Death Valley Days*. Her most famous books include a biography of her husband William Tilghman, famous U.S. Marshal and *Outlaw Days: A True History of Early-Day Oklahoma Characters*.

In the present day she does not stand out as much as her contemporaries, some reasons may be that she failed to bring a unique voice to the literary field. Despite her lack of renown, Tilghman's writings and research are an important part of Oklahoma history. She found her niche writing historical fiction and children's books, although she lacked the academic qualities needed to produce scholarly works, her stories provided an interesting counterpart to the serious genre of history. She is important to the study of Oklahoma history because she encompassed many of the qualities of her time. She wrote not only out of enjoyment, but because she needed to provide financially for her family. She was actively involved in community organizations and became a productive member of Oklahoma society as well as helping to combat the communism scare that was sweeping across the nation. Through her stories she preserved her memories of growing up in the Oklahoma Territory and to a certain extent, those of her husband. Tilghman, in her own way captured the adventure and excitement that was as much a part of settling the West as were the new cultures and effects that westward expansion would have on the relatively new American culture.

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