

Culture on the Prairie: Celebrating Oklahoma's Art Museums and Their Contributors in the  
Twentieth Century

By

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A Thesis Project submitted to the faculty of the  
University of Central Oklahoma in partial  
fulfillment for the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in Museum Studies in the  
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CULTURE ON THE PRAIRIE

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Jackson College of Graduate Studies at the University of Central Oklahoma

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**Dedication**

To my grandparents – Grandma Betty and Pop-Pop, and Grandma Lorraine and Grandad.

**Acknowledgments**

It took every second of my twenty-six years to come to the conclusion that accepting help from others is a good thing from time to time. As Zach Galifianakis' character says in *The Hangover*, "I tend to think of myself as a one-man wolf pack." But as the ultimate one-man wolf pack learned throughout the course of the film, surrounding yourself with quality friends is incredibly important to be successful; whether that success comes personally, professionally, or through another avenue, shared success is better than individual success. Now that I have stepped down from my soapbox, there are a number of people that I need to thank for their belief in me through the years.

First and foremost, I want to thank my professors at the University of Central Oklahoma. Each professor I have been privileged to have in class has challenged me as a historian and as an emerging museum professional. Although he is no longer with the program, Dr. Mark Janzen provided me with a strong understanding as to what it means to be a museum professional. He encouraged me to gain experience in as many areas of the museum as possible, and as a result, this project is a reflection of my experiences as a historian and in museums throughout the years. I also want to mention Dr. Lindsey Churchill, Dr. Katrina Lacher, Dr. Patricia Loughlin, and Professor Heidi Vaughn. Dr. Churchill pushed me to be more inclusive with my historical analysis, which has translated to how I interpret collections for museums. Dr. Lacher encouraged every research interest I had, and I think it is worth noting that my first academic conference and publication was strongly based on a paper that I wrote for her class. Lastly, although I did not have a class with either Dr. Loughlin or Professor Vaughn, they were largely influential in my schooling while pursuing my degree at UCO. Whether it was professional questions or simply

proofreading an abstract for a conference CFP, I am thankful to both these professors for their guidance.

In addition to the staff at UCO, I also want to take the time to thank the professors at the Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israel Studies at the University of Oklahoma. There is not enough space to express my gratitude to the countless individuals in this department that initially shaped my historical education. From me personally to Dr. Alan Levenson, Dr. Carsten Schapkow, Dr. Ronnie Grinberg, Dr. Janet Ward, and Dr. Gershon Lewental (who is now at Shalem College in Jerusalem): Thank you for your assistance during my time at OU. Although the topic of this project does not reflect my strong background in Jewish history, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the influence my past education has had on my career.

Next, thank you to the staff of the Gaylord-Pickens Museum, home of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Their help and guidance provided valuable insider knowledge on Oklahoma museums. To Emma Leach, Donna Merkt, Whitney Allen, Mattie Barlow, and countless others, I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to curate my first museum exhibit.

Saving the best for last, I want to thank my incredible family for their support and guidance through the years. To my fiancée Jackie, thank you for understanding my strange work habits; and for taking care of the best bulldog, Rooney. None of this would be possible without the opportunities provided to me by my parents, Ann and Joe. Thank you for setting a good example for me each and every day.

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**Abstract of Thesis Project**

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**Title of Thesis Project:** Culture on the Prairie: Celebrating Oklahoma’s Art Museums and Their Contributors in the Twentieth Century

**Chair of Thesis Committee:** Professor Heidi Vaughn

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this project is to compile a brief history of Oklahoma art museums, while specifically honoring individual contributors that have made the existence of these museums possible. The emphasis on individual contributors is a result of my employment at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord-Pickens Museum. With an institutional mission of “[preserving] Oklahoma’s unique history while promoting pride in our great state...by telling Oklahoma’s story through its people,” it was necessary to highlight individuals that helped create Oklahoma’s extensive museum network. In addition to the institutional constraints highlighted by the mission statement above, there were several factors that contributed to the selection process for inclusion in the project. The most restrictive of these factors was using Hall of Fame inductees whose portraits were already on hand at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. When a portrait was not on hand, a loan agreements were met with a number of other institutions to borrow objects. Following the historical and institutional lens described above, this project follows the guidelines typically used in academic historical works. As such, this project is a combination of primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources are heavily utilized in the first chapter to provide a historiographical background of Oklahoma history. The state’s history is important

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because it provides context to the state's art museum history. Additionally, secondary sources are utilized to help fill in gaps in the historical information. Throughout the rest of the work, primary sources including journals, letters, notes, newspapers or legislation are utilized to demonstrate one of ten individuals' contributions to an Oklahoma museum.

Although this project focuses on the individual, this project argues that these persons are responsible for the art museum community that exists today. The third chapter employs the archival information presented in the second chapter to craft two different configurations of a museum exhibit. One configuration is an exhibit physically in the museum, while the other one is a virtual exhibit developed for the post-Covid world. Although there are several publications that focus their attention on the history of museums in general, there is very little work celebrating the history of museums with a commemorative exhibit. With that in mind, the aim of this project is to establish a model other states can follow to honor their state's own museum tradition. At the very least, the aim of this project is to establish a written discourse on the unique history of Oklahoma art museums so more work can be done on the unique history of the state's museums in general.



## **Chapter 1: Review of Literature and Timeline**

In a little over one-hundred years since statehood, Oklahoma transformed from an unsettled grassland into a state with a thriving museum culture. In that time since 1907, Oklahoma was settled, cultivated. And, by the 1930s, Oklahoma City and Tulsa were evolving into cultural centers for the state with the establishment of their own artistic communities. Today, after one national tragedy in 1995 and several natural disasters, Oklahoma boasts a huge number of museums. Some of these museums are dedicated to art, while a great many others focus on topics well outside of art. Interestingly, a state with poor education statistics prides itself on the number of museums it has in its state's borders.<sup>1</sup> Poor education results certainly cannot be attributed to one issue, but the sheer number of museums in the state may seem a bit perplexing.<sup>2</sup> Several recent publications argued Oklahoma as a state has a unique history in spite of the state's short existence. One author went as far as to describe the state as America's weirdest. What better way to capture the state's oddities than with museums preserving various aspects of Oklahoma's unique and diverse culture?

In order to understand the museums that represent the state of Oklahoma, it is important to have an understanding of Oklahoma history in general. Due to the fact there is not an existing discourse on the history of art museums specific to the state, the historiographical narrative is crafted thanks in large part to sources covering Oklahoma history.<sup>3</sup> In addition to dissecting Oklahoma history, other primary sources are utilized to best complete the history of Oklahoma's art museums.

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<sup>1</sup> "Oklahoma Summary Statements", from *The Nation's Report Card*, Online, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "Oklahoma Museums", from *Travel OK*, Online, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> There was a text written in 1980 by David C. Hunt called *Guide to Oklahoma Museums*. From the University of Oklahoma Press, the book functioned as a state museum directory providing general information on the state's museums. The book presented the state's museums by towns with the occasional description on a specific museum. The book provided little historical depth, so for that reason, I elected to not include it into my literature review.

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Oklahoma was officially declared the 46th state in the United States on 16 November 1907, but the state's history started long before statehood was declared. In terms of United States history, the Louisiana Purchase by President Thomas Jefferson in 1803 signaled the start of Oklahoma history as a facet of American history. The first citizens of the land that would be known as Oklahoma were the Native Americans. Their population underwent dramatic changes as a result of the Louisiana Purchase. Following the massive land purchase, the physical land eventually known as Oklahoma was a part of Arkansas Territory from 1819 to 1828. In 1830, the land was opened for settlement. Unfortunately, the new settlers did not willingly choose Oklahoma as their homeland. Oklahoma's newest inhabitants in the 1830s were Native American tribes forced out of their ancestral homelands in the eastern portion of the United States. By the year 1890, Indian Territory was home to more than thirty different Native American nations. Understanding the history of the Native American tribes that called Oklahoma home before and after Indian removal in the 1830s is a vital part to understanding the state's history. This is where Oklahoma's unique and diverse history started, centuries ago.

Before statehood in 1907, Oklahoma's museum tradition that we recognize today was already forming. This study examines the history of Oklahoma museums by celebrating contributions made by individuals that made the first art museums possible. The information for this study will be utilized for a commemorative exhibit on display at the Gaylord-Pickens Museum, home of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. This study provides a written discourse for the history of Oklahoma's art museums by combining the relevant primary and secondary sources in order to come up with a full museum exhibit with a number of interactive programs.

There are a number of written discourses covering Oklahoma history as a state. For the purpose of this paper, the relevant secondary source material has been divided up into three

groups. The first group of sources represent academic works published on the history of Oklahoma, wherein each typically has at least a chapter dedicated to the state's culture. The second group of publications are significant because they were written following the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on 19 April 1995. There was a noticeable shift in how Oklahoma was discussed following the terrorist attack twenty-five years ago. And, the third and final group of sources examine the general history of museums. The hope is that this combination of mostly secondary sources provides a framework by which the history of Oklahoma's art museums can be measured.

The first publication was entitled *History of Oklahoma*, and it was released by Edward Everett Dale and Morris L. Wardell in 1948. As stated by the preface, "The story of Oklahoma is so long and involved that only the essential features can be given in a single volume."<sup>4</sup> Following this train of thought, the book served as an introduction to key parts of Oklahoma history, starting with the Spanish and French in the sixteenth century up until modern day for the authors (which was in the 1940s). As stated by the excerpt from the preface above, the authors believed Oklahoma's history existed far longer than the declaration of statehood in 1907. For those that assume the youth of Oklahoma leads to a boring history, they could not be more wrong.<sup>5</sup>

Despite some oversights, *History of Oklahoma* still presented a strong argument regarding the state's history in general: in order to understand Oklahoma's transformation "[from]...western Oklahoma as a region inhabited only by a few primitive [Native Americans]

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Everett Dale, and Morris L. Wardell, *History of Oklahoma*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), v (Preface).

<sup>5</sup> Dale and Wardell, *History of Oklahoma*, 1. Despite being accurate correct about the liveliness of Oklahoma's history, E. E. Dale and Morris L. Wardell overlooked the centuries of Native American tradition that existed in Oklahoma prior to the first Europeans arriving. The Spiro Mounds Archaeological Site did not open to the public until 1978, but Robert E. Bell published on findings at the site made as early as 1946.

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wearing blankets and moccasins, [to]... the growth of towns and cities and all that goes with modern urban life,” one has to also consider the pre-state history of Oklahoma to understand where the state is now.<sup>6</sup> The author’s argued 1940s Oklahoma had undergone thousands of years of change over the course of fifty years, beginning in the 1890s. In order to understand this rapid change, one needs a complete picture of Oklahoma history, starting with the first European expeditions into the state.

While all of that is important to Oklahoma history, Dale and Morris referenced Oklahoma’s earliest art collections. For the scope of this project, it is significant that two of Oklahoma’s most prolific historians mentioned these collections when discussing Oklahoma’s art history.<sup>7</sup> However, the first museum mentioned was actually not an art museum. It was the establishment of the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1894. The authors noted that it moved to Oklahoma City in 1901, where it still remains to this day.<sup>8</sup> The next mention of note was the collection of Fr. Gregory Gerrer in Shawnee. While discussing St. Gregory’s College, the authors mentioned the outstanding art collection located there. This is clearly a reference to the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art, which was established in 1919.<sup>9</sup> These passing mentions are reinforced in the chapter entitled, “Cultural and Social Progress.” This provided an additional glimpse at the early roots of Oklahoma’s art museums. The chapter mentioned Oscar B. Jacobson founding the Association of Oklahoma artists in 1916, and it even included the private

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<sup>6</sup> Dale and Wardell, *History of Oklahoma*, 5. The portion in quotes is a direct quote from page 5.

<sup>7</sup> Dale and Morris dedicate several chapters to discussing Oklahoma culture overall, including things like industry education, communication, and a brief history of Oklahoma newspapers. While the authors do mention the Northwestern Territorial Normal School at Alva (now Northwestern Oklahoma State University), they do not mention the Museum of Natural History established by Professor G. W. Stevens in 1902.

<sup>8</sup> Dale and Wardell, *History of Oklahoma*, 480. While the Historical Society does have an art collection today, they were originally tasked with preserving objects and artifacts specific to Oklahoma history. This carried over to art at the end of the 1920s.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

art collection of Laura A. Clubb in Kaw City.<sup>10</sup> This was all very important information relating to the early history of Oklahoma’s art museum community. Clearly the pair were familiar with Jacobson’s collection at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, but Laura Clubb also achieved notoriety for establishing Oklahoma’s cultural community with her personal art collection.

The format presented by Dale and Morris provided extra sources at the end of each chapter for additional reading, but they frustratingly did not utilize in-text citations. On the contrary, Edwin C. McReynolds’ monograph, *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State*, provided frequent footnotes highlighting where the historic information came from. McReynolds followed a similar approach to Oklahoma history as Dale and Morris: a balanced record of Oklahoma history must go back to the Spanish *conquistadores*. For McReynolds, it is Oklahoma people’s cultural connections to other geographic regions that elevates the story of the state’s history.<sup>11</sup> This monograph built on the narrative established initially with Dale and Morris by introducing the pre-European history of Oklahoma into the narrative. Although this discussion follows the introduction of Spaniards in Oklahoma, McReynolds accurately states, “...Spiro Mound...is a vital part of the record [of the background of Oklahoma history].”<sup>12</sup> Whereas McReynolds’ work contributed to the story of Oklahoma history in general, he did not add much in the way of specifics on Oklahoma’s art museums.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 524-6. In addition to Laura Clubb and Oscar Jacobson, the text also mentions Woodrow Crumbo, the art collection at the University of Oklahoma (now known as the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art), Nan Sheets, Waite Phillips and the Philbrook Museum, and the Gilcrease Foundation. It is worth noting that the authors included numerous examples of Native American contributors, but the artistic contributions of blacks in Oklahoma is confined to “another type of primitive-produced music...”

<sup>11</sup> Edwin C. McReynolds, *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), vii (Preface).

<sup>12</sup> McReynolds, *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State*, 14.

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McReynolds combined all of Oklahoma's culture into one chapter, "The Culture of Oklahoma: General Characteristics."<sup>13</sup> McReynolds provided examples of key contributors to Oklahoma culture that are Native American like the poet Alexander Posey, but he did not reinforce the extensive museum culture highlighted by Dale and Morris. McReynolds concluded the chapter by stating "many notable men and women...have been omitted for the obvious reason space is limited." Space limited McReynolds' mentions to Oscar Brousse Jacobson.<sup>14</sup> McReynolds extensively covered the European and Native American aspects of Oklahoma culture, but there was one glaring absence. McReynolds failed to mention a single black contributor in the chapter dedicated to the young state's culture. This felt like a mistake for a state that has produced individuals like Charlie Christian and Ralph Ellison. In the case of Ellison, he produced a text that was hugely important to American culture. Not including an author of his stature is certainly an oversight. Over the course of thirty-two years from the last monograph, McReynolds' text showed that the approach to Oklahoma's culture grew more generalized over time. Possibly Ralph Ellison's career fell victim to this generalized approach to Oklahoma history, but the author of *Invisible Man* deserved mentioning, especially anytime the state's cultural contributors are discussed.

As Oklahoma's history grew from 1948 to 1981, the amount space dedicated to Oklahoma's culture in academic works on the state decreased more over time. In Arrell Morgan Gibson's *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, the wide breadth of Oklahoma culture was contained in a single chapter entitled, "The Image of Oklahoma."<sup>15</sup> Gibson, like the state's

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 426, 430. The black population is only mentioned once, and that is a report of the population size of the community in 1950 (145,469).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>15</sup> Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 280.

historians before him, maintained that Oklahoma had a dynamic history. This dynamic history was hard to fit into one volume, but Gibson's volume was important because of the timeline it presented regarding Oklahoma history. The timeline started by highlighting Oklahoma's importance to North America's prehistory and included the culture of the state following statehood in 1907. This story of Oklahoma presented by Gibson was similar to the timeline generally accepted today regarding Oklahoma history.<sup>16</sup> For the scope of this project, Gibson's monograph reintroduced important figures and institutions to the Oklahoma museum scene that were not mentioned by McReynolds.

Although brief, Gibson managed to give an accurate picture of the art museum culture that existed in Oklahoma. Starting with institutions and peoples dedicated to art, Gibson included several entities mentioned previously by Dale and Morris: the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, the Philbrook Museum of Art, the art collection at St. Gregory's Art Museum in Shawnee, and the work of artists like Oscar B. Jacobson and Woodrow Crumbo.<sup>17</sup> He also introduced a variety of new museums, like the Stovall Museum at the University of Oklahoma (now the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History) and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center located in Oklahoma City (now the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum). By expanding the museums mentioned in Oklahoma, Gibson expanded the written narrative on museum culture in the state. According to Gibson, the museum culture was another way for Oklahomans to show strong appreciation for the state's unique heritage.<sup>18</sup> As all the authors up to this point contended,

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<sup>16</sup> Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 282. While Gibson does not mention a black contributor to Oklahoma culture, he contended that the black population in the state was important, nonetheless. This was not a perfect analysis, but it was the first historical text to place black Americans alongside the earliest settlers in Oklahoma during the nineteenth century.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 283-4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 285. It is important to note that Arrell Morgan Gibson mentions the Oklahoma Heritage Center Museum in Oklahoma City as a museum preserving Oklahoma's colorful and dramatic past. This is the first mention of the

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Oklahoma has a unique and dynamic history. What better way to call attention to the state's individuality than by honoring Oklahoma's one-of-a-kind history through museums?

Following the Oklahoma City Bombing that occurred in 1995, the state of Oklahoma was discussed differently in publications. Although the authors highlighted more than just the bombing, the tone of *Oklahoma: A History* by W. David Baird and Danney Goble presented a more critical view of the state than presented by previous historians. The two authors still maintained that the state had a long and unique history, starting with prehistoric man, stopping off at the sixteenth century with the first Europeans, and continued into the twenty-first century.<sup>19</sup> The authors are just able to observe Oklahoma following an unprecedented historical event. The other three authors focused on the cultural institutions that defined Oklahomans. Meanwhile, Baird and Goble took a different approach to discussing the state's culture.

Instead, the two approached culture in Oklahoma by using the state's biggest cultural phenomenon since World War II, football.<sup>20</sup> Although the monograph does not mention much regarding museums in Oklahoma, using football as a window into Oklahoma culture was a creative way to show the complexity of the state's culture. It also showed that life in the state was something its citizens strove to be proud of.<sup>21</sup> As the world found out in the days that followed 19 April 1995, Oklahoma pride, or the Oklahoma Standard, enabled compassion and selfless caring for one's neighbor. In the twenty-seven years between Gibson's work and *Oklahoma: A History*, the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building shifted the world's

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Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord Pickens Museum. This is significant because that is the museum I am partnering with for this project.

<sup>19</sup> W. David Baird, and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 9-12.

<sup>20</sup> Baird and Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, 273.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 273-7.



perceptions of Oklahoma. However, the tragedy that occurred in 1995 demonstrated Oklahoma's longest and most defining feature, its people.

The next two publications followed the precedent established by W. David Baird and Danney Goble: despite being critical of aspects of Oklahoma like the government, there were still plenty of things to celebrate about this paradoxical state. This was epitomized by the focus of Sam Anderson's book, *Boom Town*. After being sent to Oklahoma in 2012 to cover the Oklahoma City Thunder's quick rise to being one of the best teams in the National Basketball Association, Anderson felt a connection to the city. He went as far as to describe Oklahoma City as one of the great "weirdo" cities of the world upon further examination.<sup>22</sup>

It did not take Anderson long to realize the motivation underlying many aspects of life in Oklahoma City. As was the struggle to make it as a "world-class metropolis," Oklahoma was always vying to exist in its own glorious future.<sup>23</sup> Following the state's first national sports team over the span of a year it became obvious to Anderson that Oklahoma was again on the precipice of change. Because of the nature of time in Oklahoma, where hundreds of years of progress have been achieved in a fraction of time, the simple study of a year in Oklahoma was intimately connected to the history and politics of decades past. Anderson's *Boom Town* was a case-study for Oklahoma City, but the analysis provided by Anderson shared many parallels with the criticisms first put forward by W. David Baird and Danney Goble. As one of the state's most prominent metropolitan areas, the analysis of Oklahoma City provided by Anderson afforded valuable insight into how Oklahoma history and culture functioned in the young state. As an

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<sup>22</sup> Sam Anderson, *Boom Town: The Fantastical Saga of Oklahoma City, Its Founding, Its Apocalyptic Weather, Its Purloined Basketball Team, and the Dream of Becoming a World-Class Metropolis*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2018), xvii.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, *Boom Town*, xviii.

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outsider, Anderson offered an interesting and unique perspective. He loved Oklahoma in spite of the flaws he examined during his time in the state.

Whereas Anderson raises many valid issues concerning Oklahoma, the format of the book, with the progress of the Oklahoma City Thunder's 2012 season included into the narrative, detracted from the book's effectiveness as a legitimate historical text. A lot of these historical issues were revisited by Russell Cobb in *The Great Oklahoma Swindle: Race, Religion, and Lies in America's Weirdest State*.

Cobb added an intriguing perspective to the discussion of Oklahoma history with *The Great Oklahoma Swindle*. As someone who grew up in Oklahoma, but no longer lives here, he has the benefit of viewing Oklahoma from an outside perspective.<sup>24</sup> Since Oklahoma's inception as a state in 1907 (and even before that in the late nineteenth century), the author examined how various perspectives of Oklahoma's history are over-looked due in large part to how negatively they paint key-aspects of the state's history. The best example of this was the discussion regarding the oilman Charles Page.<sup>25</sup> As the founding father of Sand Springs, Page took advantage of thousands of Native Americans by forcefully adopting them into his colony in order to have claim to their land rights. This is just one of the many unusual and sometimes troubling situations Cobb examined throughout the course of the book.

By looking at the various points of Oklahoma culture, Russell Cobb examined the idea presented by Angie Debo that Oklahoma was an American exception. In Cobb's opinion, Oklahoma was more of an American microcosm.<sup>26</sup> This American microcosm was epitomized by the Oklahoma governor calling for Oilfield Prayer day in order to help the state make up for

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<sup>24</sup> Russell Cobb, *The Great Oklahoma Swindle: Race, Religion, and Lies in America's Weirdest State*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Cobb, *The Great Oklahoma Swindle*, 60-3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

two years of revenue failures in 2017.<sup>27</sup> *The Great Oklahoma Swindle* advanced the narrative that Oklahoma is a weird state by examining why troublesome aspects of Oklahoma's history like Charles Page are still celebrated throughout the state. All in all, each chapter contributed to Cobb's idea that Oklahoma was an American microcosm. The narrative of Oklahoma as an American microcosm built on the idea that hundreds of years of history occurred in Oklahoma within a very short span of time.

The past three texts give the feeling that there is little to celebrate in Oklahoma at the moment, but the two most recent publications from Anderson and Cobb still manage to paint Oklahoma with a degree of positivity. From Anderson's text, he came to the realization that Oklahoma City was similar to more notable cities throughout the world like Austin, Texas, or Venice in Italy. From Cobb's perspective, Oklahoma's oddity was encapsulated by the world-renowned architect Bruce Goff. Whatever one's opinion on the state of Oklahoma, one thing is for sure: the young state's extensive museum history and culture is not normal for a state like Oklahoma. In fact, some might go as far as to describe it as weird. However, when one ignores the initial feelings of weirdness and looks closer, you can see that the state's museums have an impressive history pre-dating statehood. This history is largely representative of the state's culture in general: culturally diverse, ranging from classical European art to Native American art, from the history of Oklahoma to the history of the entire West. This work aims to establish a timeline of Oklahoma museums within the scope initially established by the texts from the authors above.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

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When Oklahoma museums were initially established prior to statehood, American museums were becoming symbols of public learning.<sup>28</sup> Before establishing the timeline of Oklahoma museums, it is important to understand the purpose of museums in the overall context of a society. In the United States, history museums take on two main variations that were inspired by the private collections located in Como, Italy in the sixteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The first formulation in Oklahoma was the historical society. Although historical societies in the United States initially started collecting a diverse array of objects, their collections were focused on a specific theme.<sup>30</sup> For example, the Oklahoma Historical Society, which was founded in 1894, was specifically founded to preserve and promote Oklahoma history. This means that their collecting practices attempted to preserve Oklahoma history. Through a variety of mediums like publications, educational events, and even outreach programs, historical societies throughout the state transformed into state-funded institutions preserving key components of Oklahoma history.<sup>31</sup>

The second type of museum typically found in the United States is not associated with a historical society. Instead, these types of museums are typically formed out of a private individual's collection. In many cases, this individual is an important part of the city chosen to host the now-public collection. One example of this is the Valentine in Richmond, Virginia. Opened in 1898 by Mann Valentine Jr., the museum was further built by the founder's brother Edward V. Valentine.<sup>32</sup> There are a couple examples of these types of institutions in Oklahoma, with the most notable examples existing on the eastern side of the state. The first example of a

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<sup>28</sup> Edward P. Alexander, Mary Alexander, and Juilee Decker, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander, Alexander, and Decker, *Museums in Motion*, 111-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

private collection that was turned into a museum was located in Shawnee, Oklahoma with Fr. Gregory Gerrer's art collection. This collection became the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art. The second example of this was built around the collection of oilman Thomas Gilcrease. His private collection eventually became the Gilcrease Museum located in Tulsa. In comparison with historical societies in general, museums like the Gilcrease Museum or the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art have collections that represent culture from outside of Oklahoma. In the case of the Mabee-Gerrer Museum, some of their collection does not even represent culture on the North American continent. Despite not being dedicated to Oklahoma culture and the art typically found here, both the Mabee-Gerrer and the Gilcrease are key institutions in telling the story of Oklahoma's art museums.

#### **Timeline based on Previous Literature:**

According to the past texts on Oklahoma history from authors like Edward Everett Dale, Edwin McReynolds, or Arrell Gibson, the first museum in Oklahoma actually beat statehood by a few years. Dale and Morris mentioned the founding of the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1894. The following timeline starts with this point predating statehood and endures to this day with the continued persistence of Oklahoma museums. The following list depicts the longstanding tradition of art museums in Oklahoma, the people that made these institutions possible, and the individuals that shaped the culture and art on display in some of these key Oklahoma museums. With that in mind, it bears mentioning this is by no means a comprehensive list of all Oklahoma's museums. Instead of attempting to give information on the over 500 museums that call the state home, this list aims to provide various points of reference with Oklahoma's art museums.

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Whereas the previous texts mentioned the historical society beginning in 1894, Bob Blackburn stated the Oklahoma Historical society actually began on a day late in May in 1893.<sup>33</sup> Although historical societies only account for 83 of the over 500 museums in the state of Oklahoma, the fact that the first museum was the state's historical society was significant. In spite of the fact the first traditional museum at the historical society was not founded until the 1920s, the society still managed to collect an assortment of newspaper articles, books, documents and official reports, speeches from Oklahomans, manuscripts, and even the legislative records of the young state.<sup>34</sup> By the time the Oklahoma Historical Society opened the doors to its first physical museum, the collection included items from the Spiro Mounds but also a rocking chair fashioned out of horns. It was the introduction of the museum in the 1920s that signified the museum's shift from a collecting institution to one focused on outreach as well.<sup>35</sup> Although the Oklahoma Historical Society took almost forty years to focus on outreach, there were a number of other developments in Oklahoma that shaped museum culture in the early years of statehood.

This shift in the 1920s emphasizing outreach allowed people at the Oklahoma Historical Society like Anna Lee Brosius Korn to impact how Oklahoma history was remembered. There is some confusion as to what Anna Korn's formal position was with the Oklahoma Historical Society, but her contributions throughout the state shaped how we honor deserving Oklahomans today. In 1927, Korn was elected as first president of the Oklahoma Memorial Association. The organization's goal was to encourage a general observance of "Statehood Day" by Oklahoma's citizens.<sup>36</sup> After establishing "Statehood Day" to be celebrated annually in 1921, the twenty-first

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<sup>33</sup> Bob Blackburn, *Battle Cry for History: The First Century of the Oklahoma Historical Society*, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1993), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Blackburn, *Battle Cry for History*, 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-3.

<sup>36</sup> "Name Leaders For Memorial: Organization Will Foster Observation of 'Statehood Day'", *The Democrat-Herald* 35, 5 (13 October 1927): 16.

birthday of Oklahoma was commemorated with the first two inductees into the newly formed Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1928.<sup>37</sup> This was the first class. In 2020, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord-Pickens Museum is preparing to induct its 93<sup>rd</sup> annual Hall of Fame class. As a fervent believer in Oklahoma, Anna B. Korn's contributions clearly impacted how the accomplishments of Oklahomans are honored throughout the state today. Even if you do not have a connection to Oklahoma like those of us that live here, you are still able to determine what is important about the state's culture when you examine the now 706 Hall of Fame honorees.

Prior to the Oklahoma Historical Society turning their attention to outreach, there were two developments that continue to impact Oklahoma's art museum culture today. The first development started in Norman at the University of Oklahoma (OU) in 1915 with a Swedish-born artist named Oscar Brousse Jacobson. Clearly attempting to hit the ground running, Oscar Jacobson took it upon himself to build up the fine arts culture of Oklahoma and to some extent the entire Southwest. A year after his arrival, Jacobson helped establish the Association of Oklahoma Artists.<sup>38</sup> The association's primary objective was to "promote the cultivation of Fine Arts in the state of Oklahoma."<sup>39</sup> This was the first step in establishing the fine arts culture Jacobson envisioned in Norman and throughout Oklahoma. By founding an organization intent on promoting local artists, Jacobson's effort garnered new attention for the Fine Arts culture of Oklahoma from the general public. This was the start of Jacobson using his fame as an artist to help establish the careers of other artists. As a professor at OU, Jacobson trained many notable

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<sup>37</sup> "Two to Receive Commemoration Diplomas Soon", *The Cushing Daily Citizen* 5, 301 (15 November 1928): 8.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Allbright, "Oscar Brousse Jacobson: A Swedish Immigrant Who Dramatically Changed Art Perception in Oklahoma", (MA Thesis: University of Central Oklahoma, 2006), 31-2.

<sup>39</sup> Oscar Jacobson, "Associations of Oklahoma Artists", 1916, Oscar Brousse Jacobson Collection, Box J-1 Folder 2, Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK.

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First Nations Artists like the ‘Kiowa Six.’ In addition to building Oklahoma’s art museum culture through his own efforts, Jacobson created a legacy for others to leave a lasting impact on Oklahoma’s museums and art.

The second development is largely connected to the founding of the Oklahoma Artist Association. When the association was founded, Jacobson took the role of secretary. The role of president became the responsibility of Father Gregory Gerrer.<sup>40</sup> Father Gerrer was born in France in 1867 and went on to receive his art education in Europe learning from Roman masters in the early twentieth century. As a religious figure, he was a member of the Christian monastic order known officially as the Order of Saint Benedict.<sup>41</sup> In spite of his monastic vows to live a cloistered life dedicated to the worship of God, he had clear talent for the Fine Arts. In addition to being a world-renowned artist, Gregory Gerrer was a gifted musician.<sup>42</sup> The crowning achievement of Gerrer’s career as an artist came for him in 1904 with a portrait he completed while receiving his education in Rome.

In August 1903, Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto became Pope Pius X, and a call was made for submissions for an official papal portrait for the newly appointed Pope. After studying for several years under a number of masters in Rome, Fr. Gerrer secured special sittings with the new pope so that he could paint his portrait to the best of his ability.<sup>43</sup> The painting produced during those special sessions with the pope was so well executed it garnered an international reputation, while even spending time on display at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis.<sup>44</sup> In a sign of appreciation for Fr. Gerrer, Pope Pius X issued a public blessing on behalf of the priest from

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<sup>40</sup> Allbright, “Oscar Brousse Jacobson”, 32.

<sup>41</sup> “Faculty of the Oklahoma Catholic University”, *The Shawnee Daily News-Herald* 21, 130 (22 November 1915).

<sup>42</sup> “Brother Gregory Gerrer”, *The El Reno Daily Eagle* 1, 230 (28 June 1895): 1.

<sup>43</sup> “El Reno Artist Took All Prizes”, *The El Reno American* 14, 47 (17 October 1907): 1.

<sup>44</sup> “Apostolic Benediction”, *The El Reno Democrat And Globe* 16, 49 (21 December 1905): 1.



Oklahoma once he received a copy of the portrait in Rome. By the time the Oklahoma Artist Association was founded in 1916, Gregory Gerrer had established himself as a prominent artist while also teaching classes at the Catholic university in Shawnee.

As head of the art department at the university in Shawnee, Fr. Gregory Gerrer had one mission in mind. As a native to Oklahoma over the course of twenty-five years, the artist-priest developed a strong connection to Oklahoma. Instead of attempting to advance his own career, Fr. Gerrer had a more selfless mission while functioning as an art instructor. He worked for the advancement of art and culture in this part of the country.<sup>45</sup> Based upon this motivation, it is easy to see why Gerrer and Oscar Jacobson came together to form the Oklahoma Artist Association shortly following statehood.

The next individual to have a profound impact on Oklahoma's art museums was an artist herself. Nan Sheets gained acclaim during her lifetime first as a successful artist, then as one of the founders of Oklahoma City's artistic community.<sup>46</sup> In addition to being an award-winning artist herself, Sheets worked throughout her career to elevate others artistic abilities by displaying them in a public setting. Ensuing the stock market crash of the late 1920s and the Great Depression that followed in the 1930s, Nan Sheets was presented a career defining opportunity: she was selected alongside Professor Oscar Jacobson to direct the public works division dedicated to providing work to artists in Oklahoma during the economic depression of the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> From 1935 to 1942 until federal funding ended, Sheets worked to rehabilitate the lives of artists throughout Oklahoma by providing them work on a number of projects. From

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<sup>45</sup> "A Visit to Father Gerrer's Art Department at the Catholic University", *The Shawnee Daily News-Herald* 21, 130 (22 November 1915): 4.

<sup>46</sup> B. Rickard Fetterman, "Nan Sheets of Oklahoma", in *The American Magazine of Art* 18, 8 (August 1927): 429.

<sup>47</sup> Victor E. Harlow, "The Week Throughout Oklahoma", *Harlow's Weekly* 42, 1 (6 January 1934): 3.

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Tulsa to Ponca City to Claremore, Nan Sheets had varying success creating art centers. However, she still contributed to the cultural community throughout Oklahoma.

Nan Sheets largely built-up Oklahoma's art museum tradition by providing artists with jobs throughout the state. Not only did Sheets provide work for struggling artists, she expected their work to be of the highest quality.<sup>48</sup> She provided a space for artists to display their work, and she largely worked to make art and museums wholly accepted by the Oklahoma community. One individual described her efforts by saying, "She has done more than any other person in awakening interest and enthusiasm for art." That individual was Oscar Jacobson.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, Nan Sheets did not retire from building the cultural community of Oklahoma City until 1965. Her friendships and connections with important community leaders represented something unique about Oklahoma museums. While notable community leaders throughout Oklahoma City history assisted Nan Sheets in her efforts to build an art museum in Oklahoma City, there was also some interest from private citizens to support the cultural life unique to Oklahoma.

One of the examples of the varied success Nan Sheets achieved was in Tulsa, where private institutions were able to establish themselves before government assistance was largely available to artists throughout the state. According to Nan Sheets, there was already an organized artist association in Tulsa. In an effort to establish Tulsa's art community, Waite Phillips donated his family mansion to the city of Tulsa in the 1930s.<sup>50</sup> Due to the sheer size of the Italian renaissance-style mansion, artistic influences were able to be separated by their regions with rooms dedicated to various European artistic influences as well as art from American cultures,

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Doud, "Oral History interview with Nan Sheets", In Person, *Smithsonian Archives of American Art*, (4 June 1964), 4-6.

<sup>49</sup> "Oscar Jacobson/Nan Sheets: Their Visions Live On", from *Oklahoma Arts Council*, Oklahoma City: Oklahoma State Capital East Gallery, from 15 September 1997 to 15 December 1997, print, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph W. Keith, *Widening Horizons in the Realm of Creative Arts: Oklahoma Edition*, (Oklahoma City: Superior Printed Products, 1957), 17.

most notably Native American Art. With the Philbrook Art Center opening to the public in 1939, Tulsa's art museums followed a similar model moving forward. Instead of waiting for the government to come in and assist with building up the cultural institutions of Tulsa, private citizens established the museum society in the city.<sup>51</sup>

When Waite Phillips built his home in the 1920s, he paid attention to every detail while also sparing little expenses. When he and his family moved into the house in 1927, the cost for everything including the grounds and the furnishings was \$1,191,000.<sup>52</sup> Things that attributed to this cost included an organ in the Great Hall on the main floor, limestone brought in from Minnesota that resembled Italian marble, and a full wall mural by George Gibbs depicting “a flock of maidens in flimsy tunics.”<sup>53</sup> To further signify the times in which Villa Philbrook was built, the scene described on the villa's opening night was reminiscent of a scene from the F. Scott Fitzgerald classic *The Great Gatsby*. The food and wine costs for the party alone ran the Phillips family twenty-five thousand dollars in 1929.<sup>54</sup> By 1937, Waite Phillips was ready to move on from his Tulsa villa, and he began making arrangements to donate the ornate home to the city of Tulsa. In addition to creating the Southwestern Art Association, Phillips and his wife, Genevieve, envisioned their home as a museum with two special emphases. The first emphasis was on Native American art. The second emphasis was on historical materials. Laura Clubb's donation in 1947 added countless historical materials to the existing collection at the Philbrook.

The Philbrook Art Center represented the private interests of Waite Phillips, based upon the fact he donated the mansion to be used as an art museum. Importantly, the Philbrook brought

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Wallis, *Beyond the Hills: The Journey of Waite Phillips*, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1995), 289.

<sup>52</sup> Wallis, *Beyond the Hills*, 223. According to an inflation calculator, that would be \$17,735,016.21 in 2020.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

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together two notable names in the Oklahoma art community: Waite Phillips and Laura Clubb.<sup>55</sup> First mentioned by Dale and Morris in *History of Oklahoma*, Laura Clubb made a name for herself as having one of the state's most impressive private art collections. In an article written by Nan Sheets from *The Daily Oklahoma* in 1941, she discussed a specific artwork in Clubb's collection: an image of the Madonna by the Venetian painter Felice Schiavoni from the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> This was one example from the extensive art collection attributed to Laura Clubb. By 1947, Clubb was interested in keeping her collection together for future preservation. As a result of her desire to keep her menagerie intact, Laura Clubb donated a majority of her famed collection to the Philbrook Art Center.<sup>57</sup> Within the first decade of the museum's existence, the Philbrook Art Center brought together the combined artistic resources of Waite Phillips and Laura Clubb. This was a huge development in the history of Oklahoma's art museums.

Laura Clubb's collection originally resided in her home in Northern Oklahoma near the Kansas border. After Clubb's husband made a fortune in the oil business, a small three-story hotel was built in Kaw City. The town in Northern Oklahoma only contained around four-hundred inhabitants when Clubb moved her collection into the hotel.<sup>58</sup> Even before Clubb donated her collection to the Philbrook Museum, she gained significant recognition as a celebrated art collector. By the time her collection relocated to the hotel in 1930, Clubb was considered "the most outstanding female art collector in the world."<sup>59</sup> All of this art and a beautifully compiled library called rural Oklahoma home. While the collection called Northern

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>56</sup> Nan Sheets, "Laura Clubb Collection Includes Madona," *The Daily Oklahoman* 50, 348 (21 December 1941): 57.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Withers Teague, "Clubb Collection Sent to Philbrook," *The Daily Oklahoman* 56, 103 (20 April 1947): 64.

<sup>58</sup> "Art Collection Moved To Hotel At Kaw City," *The Perry Journal* 10, 84 (15 July 1930): 3.

<sup>59</sup> Rex F. Harlow, "The Finest Private Collection of Paintings in the World," *Harlow's Weekly* 36, 38 (20 September 1930): 3.

Oklahoma home, it was free and open to the public. For Laura Clubb, it was a point of pride and happiness that her collection was available for free to anyone willing to make the trip to Kaw City.<sup>60</sup> These feelings expressed in 1930s led Clubb to donate her collection to the Philbrook Art Center, as mentioned above. According to her, the financial backing of the art center appealed to the collector as insurance that her collection would be protected from damage in the future.<sup>61</sup> Another notable Tulsa museum followed a similar approach by relying on other Oklahomans' contributions, the Gilcrease Museum.

The background story of the Gilcrease Museum shares a lot of similarities to the background story of the Philbrook Museum of Art. As both institutions were getting started in the 1940s, they were both backed by Tulsa oilmen to varying degrees. The main difference is that the Gilcrease Museum never functioned as Thomas Gilcrease's family home before being turned into a museum. In spite of the fact the Gilcrease Museum did not open its doors until 1949, the museum was decades in the making when it opened to the public for the first time in May that year.<sup>62</sup> Prior to the museum opening in Gilcrease's hometown of Tulsa, he attempted to build the museum in San Antonio in the same building that housed his oil company. Following poor attendance, Thomas Gilcrease decided to move his growing collection. In Tulsa, Gilcrease was motivated to create a museum that would educate the public on American history with a special emphasis on Native Americans. It was important for Thomas Gilcrease to continue building his collection in 1945, and he needed someone who was willing to promote Native American artists in addition to sharing knowledge regarding aboriginal art in general.<sup>63</sup> The person identified for the job by the Creek oilman was Woody Crumbo. When Crumbo finally

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<sup>60</sup> Harlow, "The Finest Private Collection of Paintings in the World," 5.

<sup>61</sup> Teague, "Clubb Collection Sent to Philbrook," 64.

<sup>62</sup> Winnifred Gillette, "Louvre of the Plains," *The Daily Oklahoman* 58, 157 (12 June 1949): 10-D.

<sup>63</sup> Kimberly Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, (Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, 2012), 44-7.

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accepted the job offer, one of the most important relationships in Oklahoma art museum history was formed.

By the time the museum was due to open in May 1949, Woody Crumbo had already moved on from his time working with Thomas Gilcrease. Although the time spent by Crumbo with Gilcrease was short, the symbiotic relationship between the two built the Gilcrease Museum into the institution that it is today. More importantly for Crumbo, working for Gilcrease enabled him to build his career as both an artist, art collector, and as a museum curator.<sup>64</sup> Why was Woody Crumbo's short time working with Thomas Gilcrease so beneficial to the Pottawattamie artists career?

First off, part of the job offer from Thomas Gilcrease was for Woody Crumbo to function as an artist in-residence. As a former student at the University of Oklahoma as well as the former art director of Bacone College in Muskogee, Crumbo had a decade of success selling art with the assistance of the "Mother of Indian Art in Oklahoma", Susie Peters. In 1932, Peters sold twenty-two of Crumbo's paintings to the San Francisco Museum of Art. This was before the Pottawattamie artist received formal training at Wichita State University and the University of Oklahoma.<sup>65</sup> After serving as art director at Bacone College without a degree, the next career step for Crumbo included working with Thomas Gilcrease. This employment enabled the artist to continue working on his own artwork while also promoting other Native American artists in a reputable public institution. This was very important to Woody Crumbo. As it turned out, Crumbo's time at the Gilcrease Museum working with the collections was equal to any college education.<sup>66</sup> Moving forward, this career experience was highly influential for Woody Crumbo.

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<sup>64</sup> Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, 75.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Perry, "Early Life," in *Woody Crumbo* (Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, 2012), 27-31.

<sup>66</sup> Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, 75.

He went on to have a significant career as a curator and director in a number of museums. At the conclusion of his time at the Gilcrease Museum, Crumbo completed nearly 200 works, including *Peyote Bird*. The *Peyote Bird* marked the entrance to Thomas Gilcrease's museum.

The other part of working for Thomas Gilcrease that appealed to Woody Crumbo is connected to the artist's desire to promote Native American artists. As stated above, Crumbo worked to build the collections at the Gilcrease museum. This meant that he spent countless hours making trips across the Southwestern United States with Thomas Gilcrease in search of art for the growing museum. One of their frequent stops was in Taos, NM.<sup>67</sup> There is no way of determining if Crumbo was the first Native American to work in Oklahoma art museums, but he is potentially the most influential Native American in Oklahoma's art museums if you simply consider his time spent working with Thomas Gilcrease. However, his influence in Oklahoma museums was not limited to his short time spent working with the oilman. In addition to Crumbo's success as a museum director and curator, his relationship with Thomas Gilcrease established a template for how to build a thriving museum culture in a city in the state of Oklahoma. This type of relationship between a wealthy private citizen and an exceptionally talented artist eventually moved its way west to Oklahoma City. Reintroducing Nan Sheets as the main driving force behind Oklahoma City's museum culture as the 1950s arrived.

There were a number of key figures in Oklahoma City that Nan Sheets already utilized when attempting to build the first art center in the city thanks to the federal funding received. She relied on prominent names like Stanley Draper and oilman Frank Buttram to assist her with getting the first temporary art museum established in Oklahoma City during the 1930s once federal funds were provided through the Works Progress Administration.<sup>68</sup> The early help from

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<sup>67</sup> Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, 53.

<sup>68</sup> Doud, "Oral History interview with Nan Sheets", 3-5.

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people like Stanley Draper was largely influential in allowing the growth of the early art museum in Oklahoma City. This help led to a permanent home for Nan Sheets' institution at the Municipal Auditorium towards the end of the 1930s. Once a permanent home was found, federal funding for the arts was quickly diverted beginning in 1942 according to Nan Sheets. With another World War seeming imminent, the WPA diverted all funds. Overnight funding for the Oklahoma City art museum disappeared.<sup>69</sup> Nan Sheets continued running the art museum for the next decade without any assistance from the federal government. Similar to the museum model established in Tulsa initially by the Philbrook Art Institute and also by the Gilcrease Museum, Sheets relied on funding from wealthy Oklahomans to build the Oklahoma City Art Center.

The main difference between the Tulsa museum model and the work Nan Sheets was aspiring to do was that Ms. Sheets already established a functioning art museum in Oklahoma City. Instead of the benefactor seeking her out as a talented artist or art collector as was the case with Thomas Gilcrease and Woody Crumbo, Nan Sheets was proactive in finding funding for her growing institution in the 1940s. As the pioneer of the Oklahoma City Art Center, Sheets worked endlessly to improve the first art museum in Oklahoma's capital city.<sup>70</sup> Beginning in 1946, Nan Sheets organized the Beaux Arts Ball with the assistance of many individuals throughout the Oklahoma City community. Some of the most notable names to heed to call to help grow the arts in Oklahoma City after World War II were John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick.<sup>71</sup> Eleanor Kirkpatrick was initially introduced to Nan Sheets after she began volunteering with Sheets at the Art Center following World War II. From this introduction, the relationship between the two women grew around their love of art. While discussing plans to raise funds over tea, Eleanor Kirkpatrick and

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Max J. Nichols, *John & Eleanor: A Sense of Community*, (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1995), 161.

<sup>71</sup> Doud, "Oral History interview with Nan Sheets", 10.



Nan Sheets came up with the idea to raise money for the art center through the Beaux Arts Ball. Plans were quickly put in place, and Eleanor Kirkpatrick served as the first chairperson for Oklahoma City's first Beaux Arts Ball in 1946.<sup>72</sup> The relationship between the Kirkpatrick's and Nan Sheets was formed out of respect for the hard work the artist committed to establishing the state's culture.<sup>73</sup> This admiration led to the Kirkpatrick's willingness to help the Art Center physically grow in 1957.

Following almost a decade of growth and support through the Beaux Arts Ball, the Oklahoma City Art Center steadied financial matters once federal funding ended in the 1940s. Moving forward into the 1950s, John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick decided to undertake their biggest project to date. In 1957, the couple donated \$270,000 to Nan Sheets for a new facility for the art center. The total for the project eventually rose to \$278,825.54. The new building opened in 1958 with works on display from artists like El Greco and Rembrandt.<sup>74</sup> This was the first large-scale philanthropy project undertaken by the Kirkpatrick Foundation. With consideration for the big project beginning in 1954, John Kirkpatrick established the foundation in May 1955 to serve the philanthropic interest of the Kirkpatrick family. In spite of the Foundation's youth, the commitment to build a new facility for the Oklahoma City arts center signaled the Kirkpatrick family's role in building art and culture throughout the state of Oklahoma.<sup>75</sup> As Max Nichols correctly pointed out, this first donation to assist Nan Sheets build a new building for the art center was only the beginning of the philanthropic careers of John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick.<sup>76</sup> Since the 1950s, the Kirkpatrick family have donated millions of dollars to a variety of causes

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<sup>72</sup> Nichols, *John & Eleanor: A Sense of Community*, 136.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>76</sup> Nichols, *John & Eleanor: A Sense of Community*, 157.

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throughout Oklahoma. This initial donation to Oklahoma City's first art museum signified the long-term commitment the Kirkpatrick's, their daughter, and their grandson committed to the state.

As someone who currently works as a museum professional in Oklahoma, the Kirkpatrick name is something I am well aware of. Whether it is in the form of the Kirkpatrick Family Fund or the Kirkpatrick Foundation, this family's name is adorned on a number of museum exhibits or buildings as a key benefactor. The philanthropic interests of the Kirkpatrick family are well represented to this day. This representation extends past the initial gift of a quarter of a million dollars in the 1950s to help establish a permanent art center here in Oklahoma City. Upon consulting the foundation's annual reports from the past few years, it is clear they are committed to building the museum culture in Oklahoma just based on the amount of money given. The Kirkpatrick Foundation's mission statement expels any doubts about their commitment: "We support arts, culture, education, animal wellbeing, environmental conservation, and historic preservation, primarily in Central Oklahoma."<sup>77</sup> The commitment outlined by the mission statement represents the future of Oklahoma's museums.

When considering the individuals that have been inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, these people contributed the most to Oklahoma's art museums in the early twentieth century. This is by no means a comprehensive list of all the people that have contributed to Oklahoma's art museums. There are certainly other individuals throughout Oklahoma history who have positively impacted the state's cultural community, like historian and educator Joseph B. Thoburn or Jasmine Moran Children's Museum co-founder Melvin Moran.<sup>78</sup> However, this

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<sup>77</sup> Kirkpatrick Foundation, "Kirkpatrick Foundation 2016 Annual Report" (Oklahoma City: Kirkpatrick Foundation, 2016), 2.

<sup>78</sup> Thoburn was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1931; and, Moran was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1997.

chapter provides a historiographical look at the history of Oklahoma's museums. As stated throughout the work, the museums highlighted celebrate Oklahoma's art museums.

Whereas the initial exhibit will feature the ten individuals described above and their contributions to the state's art museums, my hope is that a more complete story of Oklahoma's museums will be told involving every type of museum in the state. Using this exhibit as a springboard, the goal is to stress the importance of early contributors to Oklahoma's art museums. Individuals are aware of institutions like the Gilcrease Museum, the Philbrook Museum of Art, the Oklahoma City Art Museum, and the Oklahoma Historical Society. The timeline above gives names to the individuals that made these museums possible, like Woody Crumbo, Laura Clubb, Gregory Gerrer, and Nan Sheets.

## **Chapter 2: Biographical Information on Hall of Fame Inductees**

With the first class inducted in 1928, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame was established to honor the accomplishments and achievements of individuals either from Oklahoma or living in Oklahoma. The 1928 class consisted of Dennis T. Flynn and Elizabeth Fulton Hester as the first two inductees into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.<sup>79</sup> There were other museum contributors that were inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame before Anna B. Korn in 1961. But, as the founder of the institution which continues to honor Oklahoman's achievements to this day, it felt most appropriate highlighting Korn's contributions to Oklahoma's museums before anyone else.

The argument can certainly be made that other individual's contributions were more important to the development of Oklahoma's museums. However, by creating Oklahoma's Highest Honor, Korn produced an avenue by which Oklahomans can be celebrated for their contributions to the state, but also to the world in general.<sup>80</sup> As recent literature argues, Oklahoma has been labeled as an odd state by total outsiders and former citizens who grew up here. The following ten individuals contributed enormously to the state of Oklahoma, but it would be incredibly naïve to argue that these individuals' contributions were confined within the state's borders. In some instances, the individual contributed exclusively to Oklahoma art museums but made a name for themselves in another profession. Every other person highlighted that is not considered either an artist or a museum founder (A. Korn; G. Gerrer; O. B. Jacobson; W. Crumbo; and N. Sheets) is connected to Oklahoma's oil and gas industry. In the case of many of the individuals in the oil and gas industry, their contributions to museums were attributed to the collections they amassed with their wealth. While they did not contribute to museums as

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<sup>79</sup> "Two to Receive Commemoration Diplomas Soon", *The Cushing Daily Citizen* 5, 301(15 November 1928): 8.

<sup>80</sup> "History & Mission", *Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord Pickens Museum*, Web.

educated professionals, these wealthy Oklahomans influenced the state's art museums with their collections and donations.

On the topic of museum professionals, an important discussion needs to be considered before introducing the ten individuals that helped establish Oklahoma's art museums in the twentieth century. Today, classical trained museum professionals staff most museums in general. Whether the professional has a Ph. D., a Master of Arts, a Master of Fine Arts, a Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Fine Arts or a Bachelor of Science; and as long as the individual studied a subject relating to culture, their education is largely accepted in the museum field. Professionals today follow established museum practices to ensure things are done both professionally and ethically. In the early twentieth century, Oklahoma's museum field did not have established guidelines in place to ensure the best practices were being followed.

While Oscar Jacobson, Nan Sheets, Woody Crumbo, and Fr. Gregory Gerrer worked professionally in Oklahoma museums, the museum profession was largely unestablished during this time. As a result of this, referring to these individuals as "museum professionals" is not the best choice in word. A museum director in 2020 is a museum professional, but Oscar Jacobson and Nan Sheets in 1930s Oklahoma were not based upon the understanding the profession has today. Chosen for their connections in the art world, both Jacobson and Sheets were free to follow whatever practices and ethics they were comfortable with. Instead, individuals like Fr. Gregory Gerrer were the pioneers that helped create the museum profession in Oklahoma. In some cases, the contributors influenced Oklahoma's culture in general by helping build the artistic community. What proved important for this work was the fact that these individuals established an important part of Oklahoma's museum culture. Due to their connections in the art world or the wealth they acquired from oil and gas, these individuals succeeded in establishing

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Oklahoma's art museums. They put Oklahoma's culture on the radar, and they were pioneers in the museum field in Oklahoma's early state history. As a result of this, I will refrain from referring to them as museum professionals.

The undeniable fact is that these ten individuals contributed to Oklahoma's art museums and cultural institutions. For their contributions, an upcoming exhibit in the "Story of the Portraits" gallery located at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord-Pickens will highlight their specific contributions to Oklahoma's museums. Almost a century later after several devastating events, the legacy started by Anna B. Korn in 1927 continues today by telling the story of every Oklahoman to as many students as possible.

Instead of attempting to divide the ten individuals into appropriate groupings, each individual has their own section in the second chapter. This chapter is not intended to be read in one-sitting, but it is instead designed to spark interest in the contributors and the museums they donated their livelihoods to.

**Anna Lee Brosius Korn: Inducted in 1961**

**Institution(s) Represented: Oklahoma Hall of Fame; Oklahoma Historical Society**



Picture taken by the author.<sup>81</sup>

Anna Lee Korn dedicated her life to celebrating her adopted home state of Oklahoma. She is arguably the first self-proclaimed “Okie”, as someone in the state might refer to themselves as. There is a lot of conflicting information as to when Anna Korn moved to the state with some dates as early as 1891 and other dates as late as 1917. The first indication that Frank and Anna Korn moved to Oklahoma came from a newspaper from El Reno in 1907. According to the brief excerpt, the couple had just returned back home from an extend vacation in Colorado.<sup>82</sup> Regardless of the year Anna B. Korn arrived in Oklahoma, the impact she had on how Oklahoma was celebrated continues to this day. To this end, Korn strongly advocated for a bill that created the celebration of Oklahoma’s statehood.

Seven years before the first class of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame was inducted, Anna Korn commemorated Oklahoma’s statehood by honoring the state’s birthday with “Oklahoma

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<sup>81</sup> Leonard McMurry, *Bust of Anna B. Korn*, Bronze, 1970s, Portraits & Busts Collection, Gaylord Pickens Museum, Oklahoma City.

<sup>82</sup> “Railwal News”, *The El Reno Democrat* 7, 27 (15 August 1907): 12.

## CULTURE ON THE PRAIRIE

Day.”<sup>83</sup> As the resolution’s author, Korn felt like Oklahoma’s statehood should be celebrated annually on November 16.<sup>84</sup> Through the 1920s until the end of her life in 1965, Korn was dedicated to organizing many groups on a number of civic issues. For the scope of this paper, her contributions to Oklahoma history groups are the most notable. Before moving to Oklahoma, she organized statehood celebrations in the state where she was born, Missouri. She even authored the legislation that was passed celebrating “Missouri Day” annually.<sup>85</sup> By the time she moved to Oklahoma in the early twentieth century, she was well experienced on how to best honor her home state with the support of the legislature. She committed to numerous civic endeavors during her lifetime, but the most noteworthy was her contribution to Oklahoma history. As it stated in her obituary, her contributions to honoring Oklahoma are numerous. Outside of founding the Oklahoma Hall of Fame and the Oklahoma Memorial Association during the 1920s, Anna B. Korn consistently impacted Oklahoma’s cultural community by serving on the board at the Oklahoma Historical Society for more than forty years.<sup>86</sup>

As the Oklahoma Hall of Fame approaches its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2027, it is important to honor the contributions of Oklahomans that came before us. Whatever this individual stood for

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<sup>83</sup> “Origin of Oklahoma Day”, Anna L. B. Korn Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

<sup>84</sup> Jerald C. Walker, “The Difficulty of Celebrating an Invasion”, *“An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before: Alternative Views of Oklahoma History”*, Davis D. Joyce, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 15-26. While there are certainly individuals that profited from the invasion of Native American land in Oklahoma, the ten individuals highlighted gave back to their communities by building up the cultural community of Oklahoma. Jerald C. Walker’s perspective is arguably representative of Oklahoma in general: a mixture of old Native American history intermingled with the European traditions that began populating the area in 1889. While Anna B. Korn’s story certainly represented outsiders coming into Oklahoma, her role in founding how Oklahoma history is celebrated is undeniable. Whatever her interests were during her lifetime, the interests of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame today honor those of every background for the work they do to better the state. In that sense, Walker’s piece has two purposes. First, it has its state purpose of educating about the paradox that is Oklahoma history. Second, it informs Oklahomans as to how there is historical precedent in honoring the contributions of those attached to our state. As the historical narrative has evolved, the stories of citizens to the state before 1907 have been included into the narrative of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. The most notable inductee along these lines was Chief Allen Wright in 2019, but also includes Chief Fred Lookout in 1948 and many others.

<sup>85</sup> “Founder Dies”, (12 October 1965), Anna L. B. Korn Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



during their lifetime, the fact remains Anna Korn founded an institution that now reaches thousands of Oklahoma children per year. As we say at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame to our field trip groups as they prepare for their tours, Oklahomans are changing the world. The remaining individuals changed the world in addition to positively impacting the cultural community of Oklahoma by establishing the state's first art museums during the twentieth century.

**Laura Clubb: Inducted in 1931**

**Institution(s) Represented: Philbrook Museum of Art**



Picture courtesy of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord-Pickens Museum in Oklahoma City, OK.<sup>87</sup>

According to Oklahoma newspapers in 1930, the “most outstanding woman art collector in the world” lived in Northern Oklahoma in a small town with a population around four hundred. Kaw City, the town’s inhabitants, and many other Oklahomans willing to make the journey were lucky to be patrons of the art collection established by Laura Clubb in the small town.<sup>88</sup> What makes Clubb’s story remarkable is the fact that her contributions to Oklahoma’s art museums represent a significant trend in the state. Upon achieving financial success in the oil and gas industry in the early twentieth century, several notable Oklahomans used their wealth to build their own art collections. Whereas other notable art collections in Oklahoma during the 1910s and 1920s were accumulated by artists like Oscar Jacobson and Gregory Gerrer, Clubb’s collection fit within the trend of wealthy individuals in the oil industry amassing a large number

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<sup>87</sup> Photograph, Laura Clubb, n.d., Oklahoma Hall of Fame Members Photos, Gaylord Pickens Museum, Oklahoma City.

<sup>88</sup> Rex F. Harlow, “The Finest Private Collection of Paintings in the World,” *Harlow’s Weekly* 36, 38 (20 September 1930): 3.

of fine art objects. For Clubb, her collection began thanks to her husband's luck in Oklahoma's oil and gas industry.

For anyone hearing about an art collection of this magnitude located in Oklahoma, they might have a hard time believing you. However, the little town in Kay County was home to paintings from countless notable artists like Sir Thomas Lawrence, William Adolphe Bouguereau, Ralph Albert Blakelock, George Inness, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Benjamin West, John Constable, Winslow Homer, Frank Tenney Johnson, and countless others.<sup>89</sup> Considering the fact how far Kaw City was from both Tulsa and Oklahoma City, it was astonishing a collection of this magnitude existed in rural, Northern Oklahoma.

Laura Clubb's amazing collection began receiving national attention towards the end of 1925 with a lot of the enthusiasm carrying over into the new year. Most notably, Clubb's fame was featured with a lengthy newspaper column in the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis, Minnesota just after the new year in 1926. According to the article, where Clubb's art collection lacked in size, it was still considered complete when compared to other notable art collections from the East Coast.<sup>90</sup> Throughout the 1920s as her collection grew in fame, Clubb continued making additions to her prized art collection housed at the family's hotel in Kaw City.<sup>91</sup> As stated above, it is remarkable to consider an art collection containing this depth of artists was housed in a hotel in a small town in rural Oklahoma, but that is exactly where Laura Clubb's art collection gained national recognition.

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<sup>89</sup> Phil McMullen, *Catalogue of the Laura A. Clubb Collection and the Story of Kirchbach's Famous Masterpiece "Christ and the Children" with a Biographical Sketch of the Artist J. Frank Kirchbach*, (Kaw City: P. McMullen, 1931), 9-32.

<sup>90</sup> "Wife of Cattle Ranger Sponsors Private Art Museum in Oklahoma," *Star Tribune* 49, 252 (31 January 1926): 53. This article is notable due to the fact that it provides a less predisposed opinion than some of the articles from Oklahoma newspapers like *Harlow's Weekly*; however, this article substantiates the claims made about Laura Clubb by several Oklahoma newspapers.

<sup>91</sup> "Kaw City Woman Adds Famous Painting to Collection," *The Frederick Press* 27, 25 (8 November 1929): 10.

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The national praise Laura Clubb received for her art collection in the 1920s must have been pleasant to hear, especially when you are compared to notable art collections throughout the United States. This was not Clubb's motivation for starting to collect art, however. For the art collector from Kaw City, it was more important for Clubb to make art widely available for those willing to make the journey to see her collection in rural Oklahoma.<sup>92</sup> Her dedication to increasing the availability of art throughout Oklahoma almost achieved a massive milestone in 1929. As the state prepared to celebrate the annual statehood day in 1929, it was announced that Laura Clubb was donating her collection to the state historical society in Oklahoma City. According to the article announcing the news, Laura Clubb stated, "I want the whole state to enjoy the collection..."<sup>93</sup> This followed Clubb's efforts that she established with her art collection in Kaw City. One condition of the donation was that Clubb was permitted to maintain control over the collection, however she did not specify how much control she desired.

Several months later in September 1930, Laura Clubb's control over the collection potentially became a sticking point to working out an agreement between her and the Oklahoma Historical Society in regard to her art collection. According to one newspaper article, Clubb was offended by the attitude of some of the society's members as well as the board for how they handled the situation. Clubb specifically mentioned former governor Robert L. Williams by name.<sup>94</sup> This impacted how Laura Clubb operated moving forward specifically when negotiating over her art collection. In spite of her failure to reach an agreement to publicly display her collection in Oklahoma City during the 1930s, Laura Clubb established a philanthropic reputation throughout Oklahoma only boosted by the notoriety of her art collection. At a time

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<sup>92</sup> Harlow, "The Finest Private Collection of Paintings in the World," 5.

<sup>93</sup> "Art Collection Given to State," *Miami Daily News* 27, 120 (17 November 17 1929): 12.

<sup>94</sup> "Mrs. Clubb Withdraws Offer," *The Osage County News* 19, 4 (12 September 1930): 1.

when Oklahoma was younger than thirty years old as a formal state, Clubb helped establish an art community in Oklahoma alongside more notable names like Oscar Jacobson, Nan Sheets, and Gregory Gerrer. She was clearly not an artist like the three names mentioned above, but Clubb founded the idea of making culture easily accessible to all of Oklahoma's citizens. Her philanthropic interests funded by success in Oklahoma's oil and gas industry started a trend by which private citizens began showing awareness in building up the state's cultural community. For her efforts, she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1931. Following induction, Clubb still had one more important chapter to write in her own personal history. This final chapter further established Clubb's legacy as a key contributor to the state's art museums. In 1947, one of Oklahoma's first philanthropists interested in art combined her collection with arguably Oklahoma's most noteworthy family in the twentieth century.

Laura Clubb appeared to learn her lesson from her negotiations with the historical society when she announced where she was donating her art collection in 1947. Instead of turning to an institution like the Oklahoma Historical Society that was prisoner to state funding to some capacity, Clubb decided to donate her extensive library and her million-dollar art collection to the Philbrook Art Center. This brought Clubb's collection to the house Waite Phillips' converted into a museum in 1939.<sup>95</sup> Like Laura Clubb and her husband, Waite Phillips and his family generated their wealth from Oklahoma's oilfields. Whether this influenced her opinion is unknown, but there are two accounts as to why she chose the Philbrook in Tulsa over the Oklahoma City Art Museum. According to the article in the *Daily Oklahoman* written by Margaret Withers Teague in 1947, one reason Clubb chose the Tulsa art center revolved around the fact that the institution would be able to better protect her collection moving forward into the

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<sup>95</sup> "Tulsa Is Proud to Present the Art Center," *The Daily Oklahoman* 48, 287 (22 October 1939): 1-D, 7-D.

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future.<sup>96</sup> Fortunately, the director of the Oklahoma City Art Center expressed her opinions about Laura Clubb's decision to donate her collection to the Philbrook Art Center. As a successful artist and now as a successful art museum director for more than a decade, Nan Sheets was well-known throughout the art community both locally and throughout the United States. She also continuously wrote a column for the *Daily Oklahoman* expressing her opinions regarding Oklahoma's art happenings. Laura Clubb selecting the Philbrook Art Center over her own institution left Sheets with no shortage of opinions.

According to Nan Sheets in 1947, she was delighted that Laura Clubb decided to keep her collection in Oklahoma with her donation to the Philbrook Art Center.<sup>97</sup> As someone committed to the art community throughout Oklahoma, Sheets was already familiar with Clubb's collection before it made the trip from Kaw City to Tulsa. It was this intimate knowledge of the collection and, more importantly, Laura Clubb that caused Sheets to reflect on the donation with a bit of sadness. According to the Oklahoma City Art Center director, "The paintings will be properly hung and catalogued at Philbrook, and we can still enjoy them, but it won't be the same. We shall miss Mrs. Clubb's witty remarks about the artists or the pictures. The personality of Mrs. Clubb will be missing."<sup>98</sup> Whether or not the Philbrook Museum of Art has captured the personality of "Mrs. Clubb" in their museum is largely the opinions of the museum's guests. The important thing is that the museum achieved Laura Clubb's goal of maintaining her art for future generations.<sup>99</sup> From the original donation of 82 paintings, the museum still has 59 pieces from Laura Clubb.

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<sup>96</sup> Teague, "Clubb Collection Sent to Philbrook," 64.

<sup>97</sup> Nan Sheets, "Clubb Collection Presented to Art Center in Tulsa," *The Daily Oklahoman* 56, 110 (27 April 1947): 4-C.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> John Klein, "From the Clubb House to Philbrook, Art Collection Drew Visitors Worldwide to Kaw City," *Tulsa World* (30 September 302018): Online.

What has not been considered is the fact that Oklahoma's most notable art collector from the twentieth century was a female. As noted by the article from *Harlow's Weekly*, Laura Clubb was arguably the most outstanding female art collector in the world.<sup>100</sup> Like Nan Sheets, whose art career was aided by her husband, Laura Clubb established a name for herself as an art collector. Was Laura Clubb's wealth provided by her husband's success in the Oklahoma oilfields? Without question, but Laura Clubb established a reputation largely independent of her husband's success. It was not her husband that established Oklahoma's art culture at a time when Oklahoma City did not even have their own public art center.

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<sup>100</sup> Harlow, "The Finest Private Collection of Paintings in the World," 3.

**Rev. Gregory Gerrer, OSB: Inducted in 1931**

**Institution(s) Represented: Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art**



Picture Courtesy of the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art located in Shawnee, OK.<sup>101</sup>

“His favorite saying was, ‘Let everybody paint as he feels and there you’ll have a real painting.’”

– Oscar Jacobson<sup>102</sup>

Out of all of Oklahoma’s early museum contributors that were artistically inclined, Fr. Gregory Gerrer arguably has the most impressive career accomplishment. Others might be credited with helping establish a new style of art or establishing the art community of an entire city. Both of these are huge accomplishments in their own right. However, only Gregory Gerrer can claim to have a portrait he painted personally selected by the pope to be the official papal portrait.<sup>103</sup> Following the selection, the portrait was displayed at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904.<sup>104</sup> Standing on its own, this was a massive accomplishment for any artist. The honor was

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<sup>101</sup> Photograph, Fr. Gregory Gerrer, 1938, Photograph Collection, Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art, Shawnee.

<sup>102</sup> Oscar B. Jacobson, “Gerrer”, *Art and Artists in Oklahoma*, 1950s, Unpublished Manuscript, Oscar Brousse Jacobson Collection, Box J-13, Folder 11, Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK, 5.

<sup>103</sup> “Famous Painting Goes to Rome,” *El Reno Weekly Globe* 12, 23 (21 December 1905): 1.

<sup>104</sup> Gregory Gerrer, “Application for Second Annual Exhibition by Oklahoma artists”, 1916, Oscar Brousse Jacobson Collection, Box J-1, Folder 12, Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries,



exponentially increased considering who the portrait portrayed. Selected by the pope after the artist was afforded several sittings in 1904, Gerrer's famous portrait portrayed Pope Pius X. Pope Pius X eventually became a saint when he was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1954. Building upon this notable accomplishment early in his career, Rev. Gregory Gerrer helped establish Oklahoma's art museum culture outside of the large population centers like Tulsa or Oklahoma City.

Like many early Oklahomans, Gregory Gerrer was not born in what is now known as Oklahoma. In the case of Fr. Gerrer, he was not even born in the United States. Gerrer was born in a small town in western France known as Lautenbach, but his family quickly moved to the United States following his birth. After moving around the United States for several years, the Gerrer family settled in El Reno by 1892.<sup>105</sup> As Gregory Gerrer's title indicated, he elected not to follow the traditional route to getting an art education in the late nineteenth century. He did not enroll in a fine arts college or receive an apprenticeship to learn from a master. As a Catholic, Gerrer heard the call to dedicate his life to a religious order as opposed to pursue a life outside of the Church.<sup>106</sup> In 1896, Robert Gerrer finally became Gregory Gerrer when he vowed to join the Benedictine order at Sacred Heart in Shawnee.<sup>107</sup> From this point until the rest of his life, Fr.

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Norman, OK. According to Gerrer on the application, he only had one exhibition to his name. Fortunately for Gerrer, that one exhibition was the official portrait of Pope Pius X at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. Due to the fact he was friends with the person receiving the applications, I wonder if the comment was made partially in jest. According to other newspapers from Oklahoma, Gerrer's application was not entirely truthful. He exhibited his artwork at least once in Shawnee in 1912.

<sup>105</sup> "City and County: A New Brick Building...", *Canadian County Courier and Courier-Tribune* 3, 26 (27 April 1892): 3.

<sup>106</sup> As someone who grew up Catholic and attended Catholic schools from pre-K to my senior year of high school, understanding the intricacies of sainthood and religious orders is something I take for granted. To best explain the Catholic Church to those unfamiliar with its teachings, they preach the idea that everyone has a specific vocation. The idea behind encouraging young believers to find their vocation is that they will find a career or a profession they are passionate about. By using this teaching method, it also allows for Catholic educators to recruit for the religious orders like priesthood and the various religious orders divided into monks and nuns.

<sup>107</sup> Oscar B. Jacobson, "Gerrer", *Art and Artists in Oklahoma*, 1.

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Gregory Gerrer was an ordained monk of the Order of St. Benedict.<sup>108</sup> At the time of his ordination, Rev. Gregory Gerrer served as musical director of the Catholic Institutions at Sacred Heart in Oklahoma.<sup>109</sup> As mentioned above, this was not the orthodox path of success for artists. Fr. Gerrer was not surrounded by artistic masters learning the fundamentals of art. Instead, Gregory Gerrer's journey to art school including a couple detours due to his commitment to a Christian Monastic. His story certainly fits into the narrative of Oklahoma's unique history.

In the case of Gregory Gerrer's art education, it was a classic "slow and steady" approach eventually succeeding in the long run. After serving as a music director for a Catholic Church in Oklahoma territory, Gerrer's artistic ability finally got the attention it deserved. He began taking art classes with the Sisters of St. Francis in Purcell. The classes were taught by Kate Weyniche, and he showed an aptitude for portrait painting from the start of his formal art education.<sup>110</sup> In 1900, Gerrer traveled abroad to Europe where he had the finest opportunities to continue his studies.<sup>111</sup> It was in England at the Buckfast Abbey in Devonshire in 1900 where Fr. Gerrer was fully ordained into the priesthood.<sup>112</sup> Following this ceremony in England, Gerrer had the opportunity to learn under famous art masters from the old world in Rome. Before reaching his appointed destination in Rome, Gerrer studied the old masters at the Louvre in Paris.<sup>113</sup> Following the monk's Parisian pitstop, he remained in Rome for four years studying painting and sculpting. This positively impacted Gerrer's life and education, as it was during this time he had the opportunity to paint Pope Pius X's portrait. Interestingly, it was also during Fr. Gerrer's time

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<sup>108</sup> "From Yesterday's Daily: Mrs. F. X. Gerrer and Mrs. Albert J. Gerrer..." *El Reno Herald* 7, 52 (12 June 1896): 3.

<sup>109</sup> "Pay Day: Mrs. F. X. Gerrer and Mrs. Albert J. Gerrer..." *El Reno Herald* 8, 1 (19 June 1896): 3.

<sup>110</sup> Jacobson, "Gerrer", *Art and Artists in Oklahoma*, 2

<sup>111</sup> "Rev. Gregory Gerrer and John Gerrer Left Tuesday for Europe," *The El Reno Democrat* 11, 22 (15 June 1900): 8.

<sup>112</sup> "Father Gregory Paints Pictures of Pope Pius X: Oklahoma's Famous Artist-Priest Lives Quiet Life at Shawnee," *Oklahoma State Register* 25, 25 (25 June 1915): 3.

<sup>113</sup> Jacobson, "Gerrer", *Art and Artists in Oklahoma*, 2.

in Europe that he began the mission still carried out by the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art in Shawnee today.

Fr. Gerrer established a successful museum career for himself outside of Oklahoma, most notably at the University of Notre Dame. Fortunately for Oklahoma citizens, Gerrer's first love was to Oklahoma.<sup>114</sup> While touring the Middle East in 1901 with Abbot General Marcus Serafini, he started the collection that would eventually turn into the museum located in Shawnee. According to documentation for the museum, the first item Gerrer received for the collection was an Egyptian scarab with a goose hieroglyph representing the letter "A".<sup>115</sup> It took several years for Gerrer to grow his collection to the point where it was afforded its own space, but the day finally arrived in 1919.<sup>116</sup> As the photo shows at the end of this section, Gerrer was not sitting idly by waiting for the approval from his superiors. By the time 1919 rolled around, Gerrer had a variety of objects. At the time of his death in 1946, the museum collection housed at least 5,000 objects from every time period and from every geographic corner of the Earth.<sup>117</sup> As a friend of the priest throughout his lifetime, Oscar Jacobson provided even more information on the details of Gerrer's collection.

According to Jacobson, the collection actually had 6,347 catalogued objects including 218 paintings. Many of these paintings are Gerrer's own work. The rest of the objects were

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<sup>114</sup> Part of his religious vows as a Benedictine is that he took a vow of stability. This differs from popular mendicant orders like the Franciscans in that it enabled Gerrer to stay with his community at Sacred Heart (St. Gregory's in Shawnee in 1915) for the rest of his life. Anytime Gerrer went abroad, he always knew he was going to return to the home he built in Shawnee. As a previous footnote alludes to, this is information I am aware of due to my religious upbringing.

<sup>115</sup> "Fr. Gregory Gerrer and the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art", *Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art*, Pamphlet, post-1979, Middle pamphlet flap on the inside.

<sup>116</sup> Jacobson, "Gerrer", *Art and Artists in Oklahoma*, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Nan Sheets, "Father Gerrer's Work to Hang In Local Center," *The Daily Oklahoman* 55, 244 (8 September 1946): 11-C (72).

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acquired over Gerrer's travels during his lifetime throughout every corner of the globe.<sup>118</sup>

Considering the fact the collection was compiled by one man, the breadth of the collection was impressive. There was art from Italian Renaissance artists displayed next to terracotta jars from the Babylon referenced in the Old Testament. However, Fr. Gerrer also made sure the Americas were well represented in the collection he gradually acquired. As a friend of Oscar Jacobson's, Gerrer acquired artworks from some of Jacobson's notable students from the University of Oklahoma including several members of the Kiowa Six. The collection even included a piece from Jacobson himself.<sup>119</sup> Native American nations represented by Gerrer's collection in the 1950s included nations like the Navajos, the Choctaws, the Hopis, the Kiowas, and even objects from Central American nations like the Aztecs.<sup>120</sup> He even had cultural representations from Asian and African destinations like China, Egypt, Persia, Japan, the Congo, and the Arab lands.<sup>121</sup> Like Laura Clubb's art collection, Gerrer's efforts established Oklahoma's art museum culture in the early twentieth century. In fact, Fr. Gregory Gerrer's collection was one of the earliest museums in all of Oklahoma when it opened on St. Gregory's campus in Shawnee in 1919.

Within twenty-five years of Oklahoma's formal existence as a state, two of the most important contributors to the state's art museums were a Benedictine monk and a woman from a town of well less than one thousand people. There were other contributors who helped build Oklahoma's museums during the twentieth century. Some of those contributors are even listed throughout the course of this study like Oscar Jacobson, Waite Phillips, Nan Sheets, and

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<sup>118</sup> Oscar B. Jacobson, "Father Gregory and Saint Gregory's", *Art and Artists in Oklahoma*, 1950s, Unpublished Manuscript, Oscar Brousse Jacobson Collection, Box J-13, Folder 53, Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK, 1.

<sup>119</sup> Jacobson, "Father Gregory and Saint Gregory's", 3.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 6.

countless others. However, it is definitely notable when we look back on the history of Oklahoma museums to consider the impact made by a monk and a female in the 1930s. It might be less out of the ordinary that Gregory Gerrer was successful during the 1920s due to the fact he was male. It was definitely out of the ordinary that a Benedictine monk was able to accumulate a collection with that much historical range in order to display these objects at the Catholic university in Shawnee.

The fact that one of Oklahoma's most important museum contributors was a Benedictine certainly fits well into Oklahoma's unique state history. Whether or not this is representative of the state overall is an argument for a different project. However, if you were to share the fact that one of Oklahoma's most important museum founder was also a member of a religious order, I get the feeling that most Oklahomans in the twenty-first century would not be surprised by this fact. All arguments aside, Gregory Gerrer was still the artist of an official papal portrait during his career.



Picture Courtesy of the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art located in Shawnee, OK; the photograph shows Fr. Gerrer sitting in the museum on St. Gregory's Campus around 1919.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Photograph, Fr. Gerrer's Gallery in Shawnee, 1920s, Photograph Collection, Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art, Shawnee.

**Waite Phillips: Inducted in 1943**

**Institution(s) Represented: Philbrook Museum of Art**



Picture courtesy of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord-Pickens Museum in Oklahoma City, OK.<sup>123</sup>

Waite Phillips represented a lot of the traditional notions typically associated with financial success in Oklahoma. As the younger brother of the founder of Phillips Petroleum Company, his family is certainly well known throughout Oklahoma for the success they achieved in the oil and gas industry. Waite Phillips was certainly not a slacker, and he was still largely successful in the oil and gas industry independent from his brother. Whereas his older brother Frank might be the most notable Phillips sibling, Waite’s philanthropic interests endeared him to Oklahoma when he announced in 1938 that he and his wife Genevieve were donating their Tulsa mansion to the city. The philanthropic interests of Waite Phillips are well-documented, and this was ultimately what led to Phillips’ initial contribution to Oklahoma’s art museum history.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Photograph, Waite Phillips, n.d., Oklahoma Hall of Fame Members Photos, Gaylord Pickens Museum, Oklahoma City.

<sup>124</sup> “Waite Phillips Has Two Surprises; One Is Christmas Checks,” *The Ada Weekly News* 25, 38 (24 December 1925): 2.

However, Waite Phillips is an example of an Oklahoman whose impact was felt both in his home state and throughout the United States.

When Oklahoma artist Nan Sheets established a relief network for the Works Progress Administration, Tulsa was one of the first places she attempted to incorporate into the growing federal arts program in the 1930s. According to Sheets, she failed at establishing an art facility in the city due to the presence of the Philbrook Art Center. The institution transformed from being the personal home of Waite and Genevieve Phillips in 1927 to representing the public face of Tulsa's cultural community in 1939.<sup>125</sup> Although Fr. Gregory Gerrer's small collection was open to the public in 1919, Oklahoma was lacking museums that compared to the size and stature of notable museums throughout the United States like the Field Museum in Chicago or the William Rockhill Nelson Galleries located in Kansas City.<sup>126</sup> What truly set the Philbrook Art Center apart from other museums in the 1930s was the attention to detail Waite Phillips committed to during the building process. Some of this was due to the fact the villa was initially used as the Phillips' family personal home when it was first completed. Interestingly, some of the exquisite details that make the Philbrook famous can be attributed to Waite Phillips' own decision making.

During the construction project that built Villa Philbrook in the 1920s, Waite Phillips committed himself to constructing the home to how he saw fit. As his son recalled following his father's death, Waite had no problem making a change even if it meant spending more money.<sup>127</sup> While he certainly did not follow cautious financial practices, Waite Phillips committed to an internal vision. As a result of this dedication, Villa Philbrook was an architectural masterpiece thanks due in large part to the patience and dedication of architect Ned Delk.<sup>128</sup> The house was

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<sup>125</sup> "Tulsa Is Proud to Present the Art Center," 1-D.

<sup>126</sup> H. M. L., "On Parade," *The Cushing Daily Citizen* 17, 57 (8 October 1939): 2.

<sup>127</sup> Wallis, *Beyond the Hills*, 220.

<sup>128</sup> Staff and Wire Reports, "Exhibit Displays 'Ned' Delk Designs," *The Daily Oklahoman* (21 March 1994): 9.

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inspired by the Phillipses' and Delks' Europeans travels through the Mediterranean, through Italian Renaissance cities, and through baroque villas.<sup>129</sup> Although the mansion was certainly a massive family home, it was also a work of art where every little detail was considered.

The shocking announcement came in 1938. Waite and Genevieve Phillips intended to donate their Italian Renaissance manor to the city of Tulsa. In addition to donating the home to serve as an art center, Waite Phillips promised to renovate the space. After spending around \$1.25 million in 1927 to build the house, Phillips was willing to invest another \$50,000 to ensure the space functioned as efficiently as possible as an art center.<sup>130</sup> Phillips' financial success in the oil industry enabled him to make these huge donations.

The most interesting thing regarding the Philbrook Art Center was the internal opinion other Oklahomans had on the extravagant manor. Outsiders who happened to be passing through Oklahoma were not so praiseworthy of the mansion. A fictionalized account of a large mansion built by a perceived oilman in *Cimarron* by Edna Ferber unsettled Phillips.<sup>131</sup> Whether or not Ferber was referencing Phillips or another one of Oklahoma's extravagant oilmen remains undecided. Fortunately, Oklahomans spoke highly of the mansion for the sake of Waite Phillips' conscience. The endorsement the villa needed came from an easily recognizable Oklahoman, Will Rogers. Like Phillips, Rogers traveled throughout the world during the 1920s. After stepping inside Villa Philbrook, he wryly remarked, "Well, I've been to Buckingham Palace, but it hasn't anything on the Waite Phillips' House."<sup>132</sup> When the doors opened to the art center a dozen years later, Oklahomans were still excited. Almost thirty years following formal statehood in 1907, Oklahoma's cultural community was finally able to stick it to those on the East Coast

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<sup>129</sup> Wallis, *Beyond the Hills*, 220.

<sup>130</sup> Associated Press, "Tulsa Seeks Art Fund," *The Kansas City Star* 60, 30 (17 October 1939): 7.

<sup>131</sup> Wallis, *Beyond the Hills*, 223.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.



that scoffed at the state's culture.<sup>133</sup> Like the progress made by Laura Clubb, Waite Phillips established Oklahoma's museum culture. He did this by providing a physical space for objects to be displayed.

With an established physical space in place, Laura Clubb was able to keep her collection in Oklahoma by donating it to the Philbrook Art Center in 1947. Whereas past individuals like Gregory Gerrer were tied to Oklahoma due to a religious vow, other collectors like Laura Clubb were only connected to Oklahoma by their emotions and sentiments. As someone committed to building up Oklahoma's cultural community during her lifetime, it is likely that Laura Clubb's preference was to keep her collection in Oklahoma anyways. The importance of the Philbrook Art Center was that it provided necessary incentive for Oklahoma collectors to keep their art within the state's borders when they felt the need to part ways with their life's work to ensure its future preservation. To this effort, the Philbrook Art Center collected art representing every genre. Notably, the museum's first Native American artwork was *Deer and Birds* painted by Woody Crumbo.<sup>134</sup> Known as *Hunted* today, this work is still a part of the Philbrook Museum of Art's permanent collection.

The second trend Waite Phillips established in Oklahoma museums continues to this day through the efforts of various individuals and organizations. There are a lot of factors to consider whether or not this is the most important donation in Oklahoma's history. However, any serious discussion on this topic, feels like it will play out very much like a "chicken and egg" conversation. The true significance of Waite Phillips' donation and continued support of

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<sup>133</sup> H. M. L., "On Parade," 2.

<sup>134</sup> Jeanne O. Snodgrass, "Crumbo, Woodrow Wilson", *American Indian Painters, A Biographical Directory* (New York: The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1968), 42. Up until 2009, the work was known as *Blue Deer and Birds*. However, when you look at the image in the Philbrook online collection, the title of the work is *Hunted*.

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Oklahoma's cultural community was that it opened the door for other wealthy Oklahomans to pledge their support to the arts in a public setting. As we learned with Laura Clubb, Oklahomans attempted to establish an art community in the young state during the 1920s. When Laura Clubb first looked in donate her collection in 1929, there was not an Oklahoma museum she felt comfortable leaving her collection with. The Oklahoma Historical Society existed, but the two sides were unable to reach a loan agreement for one reason or another.

In the 1940s, private interests and the public sector cooperated to smoothly operate the Philbrook Art Center. Waite Phillips was largely responsible for combining private and public sectors in Oklahoma's museums. The fact that a wealthy family donated to a museum is hardly a groundbreaking historical find, especially when you consider majors museums in almost any city throughout the United States. However, what is fascinating is the trend that has existed in Oklahoma's museums since Waite Phillips' donation at the end of the 1930s. In Oklahoma, the art museum culture is historically supported by wealth from the oil and gas industry. In the case of this project, that trend is well documented. Whereas Waite Phillips' contributions are not as numerous as other individuals in this project, his contribution to Oklahoma's museums cannot be ignored due to the trend it established.

**Oscar Brousse Jacobson: Inducted in 1949**<sup>135</sup>

**Institution(s) Represented: Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art; instrumental in developing**

**Native American art in Oklahoma**



Photo of an artwork from the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art's Collection located in Norman, OK at the University of Oklahoma. The portrait was painted by Oklahoma artist Leonard Good.<sup>136</sup>

Out of all the contributors on this list, Oscar Jacobson arguably has the most interesting career out of the ten individuals featured. Although his whole life was committed to the arts, his commitment manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout the Swedish-immigrant's lifetime. Whether related or not to Jacobson's interesting career, his historical legacy is difficult to contextualize. He was an accomplished landscape artist, and he built the art collection at the University of Oklahoma from nothing following his arrival in 1915. As director of the school of

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<sup>135</sup> Anne Allbright, and Mark Andrew White, and Janet Catherine Berlo, and Melynda Seaton, *A World Unconquered: The Art of Oscar Brousse Jacobson*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015). This whole anthology dives into Oscar Jacobson's life with chapters dedicated to his life and to his art.

<sup>136</sup> Leonard Good, *Portrait of Oscar B. Jacobson*, 1940, Oil on Canvas, Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

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art at OU, Jacobson's artistic influence built the foundations of Oklahoma art.<sup>137</sup> In Jacobson's case, the "Oklahoma art" he was influencing even pre-dated the state. Oscar Jacobson was director at the University of Oklahoma School of Art when the members of the famous "Kiowa Six" first arrived in Norman in 1927. Jacobson educating Native American artists certainly influenced Oklahoma's museums. His efforts enabled Native Americans to develop their careers further than they were able to in nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>138</sup>

A lot of attention has been deservedly paid to Jacobson's contributions to Native American art. Even though he has a complicated legacy dealing with Native American art, this section highlights Jacobson's concrete contributions to Oklahoma's cultural community. Oklahoma's art history would not be as extensive and unique without Oscar Jacobson's contributions beginning with his appointment to the University of Oklahoma in 1915. Fortunately for the state's cultural community, Jacobson capitalized on his success as an artist to build an art museum in Norman.

When Oscar Jacobson arrived on campus in Norman in 1915 with his wife, Dean Frederik Holmberg felt like he hired the absolute right man for the job.<sup>139</sup> Some of this possibly had to do with the fact that both men were graduates of Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas, but there was no way Holmberg could have accounted for the long-term success Jacobson had at the University of Oklahoma.<sup>140</sup>

The first aspect of Jacobson's career worth examining was his success as a painter throughout his lifetime. There was a chance that the university was interested in Jacobson due to

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<sup>137</sup> "The University of Oklahoma Bulletin: The College of Fine Arts Announcements", Series No. 522, (1 July 1932), University of Oklahoma Archives, College of Fine Arts Collection, Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK.

<sup>138</sup> See *Woody Crumbo*, page 89.

<sup>139</sup> "Prof. Oscar B. Jacobson and Wife Have Arrived...", *The Daily Transcript* 3, 70 (8 October 1915): 4.

<sup>140</sup> Lindsborg, KS is a community of Swedish immigrants in Central Kansas. As someone who comes from Swedish ancestry, I am definitely familiar with the Scandinavian history of Lindsborg.

his painting ability, but Holmberg's desire to hire Jacobson combined with the fact he was an excellent educator certainly built up the young artist's chances at being hired. As an accomplished artist in his own right, Jacobson has paintings in numerous collections throughout the United States today.

In addition to being a professional artist while serving as a faculty member at OU, Jacobson positively impacted numerous instructors during his time as an educator at the university. As far as art instructors are concerned, Jacobson worked with Edith Mahier, Dorothy Kirk, Leonard Good, Joseph Taylor, Harriet Kritser, John O'Neil, and many others during his time at in Norman.<sup>141</sup> This helped him build the school of art at the university by having numerous capable instructors in artistic fields like painting and sculpting. Jacobson's legacy was largely influenced by the success of other artists that he taught during his lifetime. One of Jacobson's early success stories involved establishing the College of Fine Arts' reputation at the University of Oklahoma beginning in 1915. As prior sources indicated, Oklahoma was not known as a cultural oasis during the 1920s and 1930s. In spite of that reputation from outside that the citizen's lacked culture, countless Oklahoma artists produced remarkable work while at in Norman at the university in the 1920s and 1930s.

Some of the most notable artists Jacobson taught were Native American artists. Beginning in the 1920s, Susie Peters sought to provide some form of formal art education for some of her more gifted students. By 1926, Oscar Jacobson was interested in bringing the students to the University of Oklahoma.<sup>142</sup> By 1927, four students arrived in Norman to begin their special instruction at the University of Oklahoma taught by Oscar Jacobson and Edith

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<sup>141</sup> "The University of Oklahoma Bulletin: The College of Fine Arts Announcements", Series No. 749, (15 September 1938), University of Oklahoma Archives, College of Fine Arts Collection, Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK.

<sup>142</sup> "Tess' Tea Table Talk from Different Angles," *The Oklahoma News* 26, 186 (9 May 1932): 7.

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Mahier outside of the university's formal classes. The group grew to six several months later when James Auchiah and Lois Smoky joined the others in Norman. By the late 1920s, the nationally recognized artists known as the Kiowa 6 lived and produced art under the direction of Jacobson and Mahier. Jacobson even went on to publish a portfolio of five of the students work. According to sources, the works for the portfolio were completed while the artists were at the University of Oklahoma.<sup>143</sup> According to scrapbooks from the Oscar B. Jacobson Collection at the Oklahoma Historical Society, Jacobson was adopted into the Kiowa tribe for his contributions to Native American art.<sup>144</sup> Whether an honorary ceremony held early in the evolution of Native American art in the twentieth century cemented Jacobson's place as an ally to Native Americans remains to be determined to some degree. The undeniable fact is that since the first Kiowa artists arrived on campus in the 1920s countless other Native American artists spent time at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. The drawbacks of Jacobson's career were highlighted by Woody Crumbo, but his successes hold substantial weight due to their importance to American art.<sup>145</sup> The fact that artists from twenty-two Native American nations received some education from the University of Oklahoma demonstrated Jacobson's influence on the art department in Norman and aboriginal art in general.

This is where Oscar Jacobson's legacy gets complicated, but that will be discussed more in Woody Crumbo's portion of the chapter.<sup>146</sup> There was no denying the impact Oscar Jacobson

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<sup>143</sup> Oscar Brousse Jacobson, *Kiowa Indian Art: Watercolor Paintings in Color by the Indians of Oklahoma*, (Nice, France: C. Szwedzicki, 1929), Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK.

<sup>144</sup> "Oscar B. Jacobson Made Kiowa Chief", Oscar B. Jacobson Collection, Oversize Box 4, Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), Oklahoma City, OK.

<sup>145</sup> See "Woody Crumbo".

<sup>146</sup> I was hired as a Mellon Foundation curatorial intern in Native American art at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art in Fall 2020. Working with the collections at the museum in Norman informed me about Jacobson's career as an artist and Jacobson's career as an art educator. While working as an intern, my project was to research Native American artists that attended the University of Oklahoma during the 1920s and 1930s. My opinion on Jacobson and Native American art in general was largely informed as a result of this project. Woody Crumbo was a Native

had on Oklahoma's art community as both an artist and as an educator. But, as an influential Oklahoman and as an art collector, Jacobson also encouraged others to use their wealth for artistic means. In the 1930s, Jacobson partnered his artistic talents with the wealth and support of an Oklahoma oilman.

Like any good story, Jacobson's partnership with oil wealth provided its twists and turns before it was fully established in 1936.<sup>147</sup> In 1919, newspaper headlines accused Jacobson of claiming that Oklahoma's oil and gas industry was holding the state back artistically while speaking at an event in New York.<sup>148</sup> Being openly critical of Oklahoma's oil and gas industry was definitely a bold strategy for Jacobson to take, but his success as an educator was undeniable. Just five years after coming to Norman, enrollment in Jacobson's art department went from 23 to 255 at the start of the Fall 1920 semester.<sup>149</sup> Fortunately for Jacobson, his comments did not have a lasting effect on his overall success at the University of Oklahoma. In fact, Oscar Jacobson felt emboldened by his collecting to make the push for a formal museum at the university just a year later.<sup>150</sup> It was between Jacobson's request for a university museum and the actual OU Museum of Art's founding in 1936 that he collected art that would make up the museum's collection alongside the Wentz-Matzene donation.

As mentioned above, Jacobson was influential in helping build up Native American art during the 1920s and 1930s at the University of Oklahoma. Jacobson also managed to travel to North Africa in 1925 with his wife. During Oscar's and Jeanne d'Ucel's travels, they acquired a

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American art student under Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma, and the relationship between the two created an interesting story line.

<sup>147</sup> In 1936, the Wentz-Matzene Collection of Asian art was donated to the University of Oklahoma. With this donation, the university's art museum was established.

<sup>148</sup> "Crude Oil Means Crude Art; Professor Mourns Because Oklahoma Is Not Refined," *The Daily Oklahoman* 30, 230 (17 May 1919): 1.

<sup>149</sup> "Art Department Shows Remarkable Increase," *The Oklahoma Daily* 15, 24 (19 October 1920): 1.

<sup>150</sup> "Jap Uniforms Art Feature," *The Oklahoma Daily* 15, 72 (14 January 1921): 1.

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collection of Berber artifacts consisting of pottery, jewelry, and textiles the couple eventually sold to the university for \$800.<sup>151</sup> Jacobson's other notable collecting endeavor was connected to his love of Native American art. While working on federal art projects following the Great Depression, Jacobson established connections with a number of artists throughout the region as a technical advisor for Public Works Art Project (PWAP) and then the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) starting in 1934. Based upon the collections at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, Jacobson secured art from these federal projects on several occasions in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>152</sup> From Jacobson's allocations, the OU Museum of Art gained 143 pieces of art. Through his collection efforts, Jacobson highlighted all types of art. He collected works from Native American artists like the ones he taught in 1927, and he collected artwork from his colleagues and students at the University of Oklahoma.

Was there a limit to what type of artwork Oscar Jacobson collected for the University of Oklahoma? Jacobson was a strong supporter of art in all capacities during his lifetime, even if he did not identify with how the art was displayed.<sup>153</sup> However, his acceptance of all art clearly influenced his own works. As you look at Jacobson's landscapes paintings, there is definitely a degree of realism; but one also sees artistic influences from impressionism. From his depictions of the sea, you can see clear Asian art influences. The waves Jacobson painted look similar to some of the work done by notable Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, especially in his work *Elegy of the Sea (Coast of Sweden)*.<sup>154</sup> This openness to art in all forms allowed for both the art department at the university to grow at the rate it did in terms on enrollment, and it also allowed

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<sup>151</sup> Jeanne d'Ucel, *Memoir and Biographical Writings*, Unpublished Memoir, ca. 1962, Box 1, Folder 1, Oscar B. Jacobson Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), Oklahoma City, OK, 101.

<sup>152</sup> Anne Allbright, and Mark Andrew White, "Oscar Brousse Jacobson, Cultural Broker", *A World Unconquered: The Art of Oscar Brousse Jacobson* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 24-5.

<sup>153</sup> Oscar Jacobson, "The Meaning of Modernism in Art", *American Magazine of Art* 15, 1 (January 1924): 697-703.

<sup>154</sup> Oscar Jacobson, *Elegy of the Sea (Coast of Sweden)*, 1923, oil on canvas, Elaine Bizzell Thompson Study Room, University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK.



for Jacobson to have success as an art museum director. Selected due to his connections in the art world and his success at the University of Oklahoma, Oscar Jacobson was named director of the OU Museum of Art's in 1936.

In 1936, Oscar Jacobson demonstrated his potential as an art museum director when he partnered with one of Oklahoma's wealthiest oilmen from Ponca City. By 1935, oilman Lew Wentz and photographer Richard Gordon Matzene were looking to offload a collection of 785 objects of Asian art. Storage costs for the objects grew too high, so they looked to donate the objects.<sup>155</sup> This donation combined with Jacobson's collecting efforts through the 1920s and 1930s left the museum with a collection of almost 1000 objects featuring a wide range of art. From Jacobson's effort, there was art from notable Native American artists, many of whom were students at the University of Oklahoma. A number of the works from the Native American artists were even painted while they were taking classes in Norman.<sup>156</sup> There was art from a number of Oklahoma artists, including both Fr. Gregory Gerrer and Nan Sheets. There was also art works from notable University of Oklahoma faculty members and alumni who benefitted from Jacobson's efforts to build Oklahoma's cultural community. In addition to admiring Native American art, Oscar Jacobson also felt a strong connection to his adopted home in Oklahoma. As you see from Jacobson's artwork *The Red Tank or Indian Pool* (pictured below), he saved some of his best compositions for Oklahoma.

Following the establishment of the OU Museum of Art in 1936, Oscar Jacobson served as director until he decided to retire in 1952. For almost twenty years he built the legacy of the art museum at the University of Oklahoma. His success at building up school enrollment combined with his collection efforts granted him induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1949. At the

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<sup>155</sup> Jeanne d'Ucel, *Memoir and Biographical Writings*, Box 1, Folder 3, 217.

<sup>156</sup> This has largely been the scope of my research while at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art.

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time of induction, Jacobson retired from his duties as art school director to pursue other avenues in his career. Building up the art museum was one of his main undertakings from 1945 until he officially retired in 1952.<sup>157</sup> Since 1921, this was one of Jacobson's main career pursuits. After critiquing Oklahoma for its infatuation with the oil industry and the money it produced in 1919, Jacobson established a strong connection between Oklahoma's art museums and the oil and gas industry that exists to this day.

In Oklahoma museums today, there is definitely a sense of community. This sense of community applies to the individual museum you work at in my opinion, but it also applies to Oklahoma museums in general. This is something I have been fortunate enough to experience in my short time working in Oklahoma museums. I am an employee at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, but I have also had the opportunity to intern at a number of Oklahoma museums like the Chisholm Trail Museum in Kingfisher, the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, and now the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art in Norman. Every museum I have walked into, there is at least one familiar face there.

The connectivity in Oklahoma museums that exists today was similar to the art network established between Oklahoma artists taught by Oscar Jacobson. As an artist, an educator, a museum director, and as an art collector, Jacobson established an Oklahoma art community. This is evident by the collection at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, which consists of countless works of art produced by Oklahoma artists. Jacobson's major accomplishment was finding a way to bring Oklahoma's talented artists together. Just following the scope of this project, Oscar Jacobson was connected to several individuals in a number of roles. He taught Woody Crumbo while he was at OU from 1936 to 1938. He was so close with Nan Sheets that she hosted the first

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<sup>157</sup> "Jacobson Gets Hall of Fame Award Today," *The Oklahoma Daily* 36, 46 (16 November 1949), 1, 15.

retrospective exhibition of Jacobson's work in 1941.<sup>158</sup> Gregory Gerrer and Jacobson were pen pals, and they would frequently write to each other about art.<sup>159</sup> These connections only scratch the surface of Jacobson's influence on Oklahoma's cultural community between 1915 and 1952.

Although Jacobson's career was worthy of praise for all he personally accomplished, he possibly deserved more praise for the progress he made in creating a platform for other artists to have their artwork recognized. To clarify, I am not saying Jacobson deserves more praise due to the fact I feel like his accomplishments as an artist are well-recognized. I am saying that his work for other artists created a positive, lasting legacy for Oklahoma artists to have their artwork displayed. There is no denying the fact that Jacobson was one of the first people to encourage Native American artists to paint according to their own traditions, but there is also a strong possibility that he profited from artwork that was not his own. The facts surrounding Jacobson's business practices when dealing with Native American art are hazy at best. What was not hazy was Jacobson impact on Oklahoma's artistic community. As one looks through the permanent collection at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, Oklahoma art is well-represented thanks in large part to the education and collecting by the Swedish immigrant Oscar Brousse Jacobson.

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<sup>158</sup> "Oscar B. Jacobson: Retrospective Exhibition, 1912 to 1940", Catalogue, *W.P.A. Oklahoma Art Center*, (29 March 1941), Oscar B. Jacobson Collection, Oversize Box 5, Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), Oklahoma City, OK.

<sup>159</sup> Letter from Fr. Gregory Gerrer to Oscar Jacobson, 26 January 1919, Oscar Brousse Jacobson Collection, Box J-1, Folder 13, Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK.

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Picture currently on display at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art in Norman, OK.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Oscar Jacobson, *The Red Tank or Indian Pool*, Oil on Canvas, 1940, Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Gift of Robert Long.

**William Thomas Gilcrease: Inducted in 1952****Institution(s) Represented: Gilcrease Museum**

Picture taken by the author.<sup>161</sup>

In 1939, Oklahoma’s museum community changed forever when the Philbrook Art Center opened its doors after Waite and Genevieve Phillips’ enormously generous donation. Only a decade later in the same city, another art museum opened its doors. Whereas the Philbrook venture required repurposing an Italian, Renaissance-inspired villa into a museum, Thomas Gilcrease’s museum required building a physical space to house the collection. Although Gilcrease began collecting in 1912, his museum was not opened until 1949.<sup>162</sup> Although the two approached constructing their museums differently, their approach shared a lot in common as well. Their commonalities started a trend in Oklahoma museums. Thomas Gilcrease was the second in a line of notable oilmen from Oklahoma to transform their life’s work of collecting art and artifacts into a museum. Thomas Gilcrease even relied on others to

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<sup>161</sup> Larry Pendleton, *Portrait of Thomas Gilcrease*, Oil on Canvas, n.d., Portraits & Busts Collection, Gaylord Pickens Museum, Oklahoma City.

<sup>162</sup> Margaret Withers Teague, “Oilman Built a Museum for His Indian People’s Art,” *The Kansas City Star* 69, 233 (9 May 1949): 3-C.

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help him build the collection that would become the nucleus of the Gilcrease Museum. Although Gilcrease's background shares more similarities with Waite Phillips, the extent of Thomas Gilcrease's collecting brought Gregory Gerrer's collection to mind. Although Gerrer did not have financial backing like Gilcrease, both collected amazing artifacts with the intention of sharing their collection with others.

Born in Louisiana, Thomas Gilcrease moved to Oklahoma with his family when he was only a few months old in 1890.<sup>163</sup> Elizabeth Gilcrease, Thomas's mother, was Creek Indian, so that meant that the future oilman was half Creek. Due to her ancestry, her and the children received land rights in the Creek Nation in Oklahoma. Oil was struck four miles from his family's land in 1905. By 1908, Thomas Gilcrease left his family land to receive an education. While attending school at Bacone College in Muskogee, oil was discovered on his family's land in 1908. By 1917, Gilcrease had thirty-two producing oil wells to his name.<sup>164</sup> Throughout the 1930s, Thomas Gilcrease succeeded in the oil industry. His financial success allowed him to pursue an interest that started with Gilcrease in 1912. This was the year he purchased his first oil painting.<sup>165</sup> By 1925, Gilcrease's identity as a collector was clear. As his wealth grew, Thomas Gilcrease traveled the world. He was inspired by the things he saw in Europe. Instead of attempting to capture a fraction of the artifacts preserving European history, Gilcrease was inspired to preserve artifacts that related to his own people's history and culture.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Martin Wengner, "Thomas Gilcrease", *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 40, 2 (Summer 1962): 94-99. A bulk of the biographical information regarding Gilcrease was pulled from this brief chapter. The author was the Librarian at the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History in Art in 1962. The article was written from someone who knew Thomas Gilcrease personally in addition to working with him at the Gilcrease Museum. I take away the parts that are pertinent to Oklahoma's museum culture.

<sup>164</sup> Wengner, "Thomas Gilcrease", 94.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

When the “Louvre of the Plains” opened in 1949, newspapers declared that “the best in Indian Art and Craftsmanship finds a worthy setting in a new museum near Tulsa.”<sup>167</sup> From 1925 until the museum’s opening in 1949, Thomas Gilcrease dedicated a significant amount of effort and attention to building his museum collection. When the museum opened its doors, Thomas Gilcrease opened his collection of thousands of books, paintings, vases, and other artifacts to the public. Winnifred Gillette summed up Gilcrease’s contribution the best. When talking about Native American history and culture, she said, “It is the history of the culture of America—a complete and authentic account of Indian life, as described by people who knew what they were writing or drawing about. The vision of Thomas Gilcrease in collecting these treasures is something men will remember as long as they treasure the past.”<sup>168</sup>

Up through this point, Gilcrease’s story falls in line with other collectors featured throughout the project. Like Laura Clubb, he knew what kind of objects he wanted for his collection. Like Gregory Gerrer, he acquired a large number of objects to share in a public setting like a museum. Like Waite Phillips (and Laura Clubb), Thomas Gilcrease relied on his success in the oil industry to also achieve success collecting art and historic artifacts for preservation. Thomas Gilcrease went on to have financial troubles in the 1950s, and he required financial assistance to keep his collection in Tulsa. Fortunately for Oklahomans, the collection remained in Tulsa since the museum opened in 1949. What sets the Gilcrease story apart from the other museum stories told previously was the partnership he established in 1945 to help him build his art museum’s collection.

According to Thomas Gilcrease biographers, he first attempted to open a museum with his collection in 1942 in San Antonio. However, due to poor attendance possibly combined with

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<sup>167</sup> Winnifred Gillette, “Louvre of the Plains,” *The Daily Oklahoman* 58, 157 (12 June 1949): 10-D.

<sup>168</sup> Gillette, “Louvre of the Plains,” 11-D.

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Gilcrease's connection to Oklahoma, the decision was made to move the expanding collection to Tulsa.<sup>169</sup> When he moved the collection, Gilcrease did not announce that he planned to build a museum. In fact, the newspaper articles about the Gilcrease collection prior to 1949 are either reports of notable visitors to the collection or an announcement for a new exhibit.<sup>170 171</sup> During these gap years after moving from Texas before establishing a formal museum outside of Tulsa, Thomas Gilcrease hired Woody Crumbo in 1945 to help build his collection. During World War II, Crumbo shifted his artistic focus from more traditional paintings to painting camouflage for Douglas Aircraft Corporation in Tulsa.<sup>172</sup> Ultimately, the reason why Gilcrease recruited Woody Crumbo to join him was due to the Potawatomie artist's depth of Native American art knowledge.

Woody Crumbo's story will be examined more in depth in his own section. Crumbo's involvement with Thomas Gilcrease started in 1945; this is where the story of one of Oklahoma's most important museum partnership begins.

The relationship between the two began on a spring day in 1945 when Crumbo and his family were invited to visit Thomas Gilcrease's growing collection known as the *Gilcrease Foundation*. Before the two even discussed working together, Gilcrease's collection was immense. In a small, renovated barn, the Thomas Gilcrease Foundation housed 10,000 archival items including numerous one-of-a-kind manuscripts, 130 oil paintings, and thirty bronze statues.<sup>173</sup> Although Gilcrease was not there, the collection clearly left an impression on Crumbo. He initially declined to assist Gilcrease in collecting, but persistence from the oilman finally

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<sup>169</sup> Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, 46.

<sup>170</sup> "Six Paintings by Blackowl, Indian Artists, at College", *Miami Daily News Record* 44, 115 (10 December 1946): 11.

<sup>171</sup> "Art Faculty Members Visit State Exhibitions", *The Oklahoma Daily* 32, 39 (6 November 1945): 4.

<sup>172</sup> "Crumbo Working Under Foundation Art Fellowship", *The Oklahoma Daily* 32, 42 (10 November 1945): 6.

<sup>173</sup> Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, 45.



convinced Crumbo. By November 1945, it was announced that Crumbo joined the Gilcrease working as an art fellow.<sup>174</sup> The former student of Oscar Jacobson's that left in 1938 without a BFA; more recently, the former art director of Bacone Indian College in Muskogee was personally pursued by Thomas Gilcrease to assist him collect art. Whereas Gilcrease pursued Crumbo for his own abilities as an artist, there was another reason the oilman was drawn to the Potawatomie artist. The fact that both men shared common ground due to their Native American ancestry helped, but this was not what made their partnership so important. Both men held similar views regarding Native American history and culture. They wanted to create a platform by which Native American culture and history was honored and celebrated for its accomplishments and diversity.<sup>175</sup> The partnership brought together Gilcrease's motivations to build a museum telling American history from the Native American perspective with Crumbo's motivation to preserve Native American culture while promoting modern artists.

What followed was a relationship between the two by which Woody Crumbo devoted a portion of his time to his own artwork. To this end, the Gilcrease collection contained almost 200 works produced by Crumbo in Spring 1948.<sup>176</sup> Another portion of his time was spent mentoring other Native American artists. The notable artist, Willard Stone, requested to live near Woody Crumbo when the two were both working as artist-in-residence with Gilcrease.<sup>177</sup> Not only did Crumbo supply Gilcrease with his own art, he encouraged other artists to produce magnificent works of art. Specifically focusing on Willard Stone, the Gilcrease collection contains over fifty

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<sup>174</sup> "Crumbo Working Under Foundation Art Fellowship", 6.

<sup>175</sup> Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, 47.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 54. The text goes on to say that around 150 of these works were completed while Crumbo was an artist-in-residence at the Gilcrease.

<sup>177</sup> Willard Stone, "Letter from Stone to Gilcrease asking about living near the Foundation to enable him to do research and study with Crumbo", (5 March 1947), Willard Stone Manuscript Collection, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK.

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pieces of his work.<sup>178</sup> More attention will be paid to Woody Crumbo in his own section due to the fact he was successful in the museum world in his own right. The true significance of the partnership between Gilcrease, Crumbo and the collection it produced was that it provided a nationally recognized platform for Native American culture. The Philbrook Art Center had a portion of their collection dedicated to Native American art, but this was the first museum in Oklahoma that primarily emphasized the Native American perspective of American history. Instead of Thomas Gilcrease partnering with a professor with an extensive background in museums and Native American culture, he partnered with an individual that intimately knew the story Gilcrease wanted to tell through his collecting.

Their partnership showed the importance of private funding from motivated citizens to Oklahoma's museum, but it demonstrated the importance of two additional things. First, it showed the importance of having an appropriate representative to tell the museum's story. Woody Crumbo's early life largely represented the Native American experience in the twentieth century.<sup>179</sup> As Native Americans, both Thomas Gilcrease (Creek) and Woody Crumbo (Potawatomie) grew up practicing Native American culture. Crumbo and Gilcrease were telling the American story largely from their own perspective. Second, the partnership revealed the importance of relying on someone who knows the art community. When Laura Clubb was building her collection in the 1920s, she had an art dealer. When Thomas Gilcrease wanted to build a collection of art representative of Native American culture, he employed a successful Native American artist and art instructor. In the case of Oklahoma's art museum history, several nationally renowned artists from the state contributed aspects of their career to building Oklahoma's cultural institutions.

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<sup>178</sup> Roblin, "At Gilcrease," in *Woody Crumbo*, 54.

<sup>179</sup> See *Woody Crumbo*, page 89.

**Nan Sheets: Inducted in 1953**

**Institution(s) Represented: Oklahoma Art Center; Oklahoma City Museum of Art**



Picture taken by the author.<sup>180</sup>

“...Nan Sheets Finds Time From Her Household Duties to Put on Canvas Things Which Interest Her.” – *The Daily Oklahoman*<sup>181</sup>

The headline listed above from 1926 was emblematic of the expectation’s women faced in the country’s society. Oklahoma City artist Nannine Jane “Nan” Quick Sheets met these expectations to run a successful household, but that is not why she is the focus of this excerpt. Instead, the fact that Nan Sheets “paints like a man” is the reason one of Oklahoma City’s earliest artists was highlighted.<sup>182</sup> The following information serves as a bio for the life and career of Nan Sheets. More importantly, the following sources demonstrate Sheets’ importance to Oklahoma museums in general. As the creative mind behind many firsts in Oklahoma’s art

<sup>180</sup> Stanislav Rembski, *Portrait of Nan Sheets*, Oil on Canvas, n.d., Portraits & Busts Collection, Gaylord Pickens Museum, Oklahoma City.

<sup>181</sup> Lucille Ralston, “Urge To Paint Thrusts City Woman Into Prominent Place As An Artist: Nan Sheets Finds Time From Her Household Duties to Put on Canvas Things Which Interest Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman* 32, 283 (26 October 1924): 11-C.

<sup>182</sup> Ralston, “Urge To Paint Thrusts City Woman Into Prominent Place As An Artist”, 11-C.

## CULTURE ON THE PRAIRIE

scene, Nan Sheets was pivotal in instituting key components of Oklahoma's museum culture. She helped build Oklahoma City's growing cultural community as an artist, art teacher, and as the director of a federally funded art museum in Oklahoma City during the Great Depression. Her role as Oklahoma City's first art museum professional beginning in the 1930s adds to the narrative of Oklahoma being a weird state.

Instead of being content with being confined to the role of housewife, Nan Sheets' love of art instilled in her from a young age by her mother inspired her to accomplish more during her lifetime than simply running an organized and successful home for her husband.<sup>183</sup> As one of the founding members of the art community throughout Oklahoma, well-known individuals in the Oklahoma art community like Oscar Jacobson were even aware of the stature of an upcoming artist like Nan Sheets in the 1920s. What follows is the first chapter in Nan Sheets influential life in Oklahoma museums: her successful career as a female artist in the United States prior to Second-wave feminism (in the 1960s).

Like many of our early Oklahomans that ended up calling the state home, Nan Sheets was not born in Oklahoma. She was originally born in Albany, Illinois. It was her time growing up in Illinois when she would visit the art museums in Chicago that had a huge impact on her future career. The impact this had on a young Nan Sheets was seen in her willingness to finish artwork which started at a young age. Her mother never had to coax her to finish any art assignments.<sup>184</sup> This work ethic was something Nan Sheets carried with her to multiple aspects of her life. Following high school, she enrolled at Valparaiso University as one of two females in her class of one-hundred fifty-two in pharmacy school in the early twentieth century. She graduated in

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<sup>183</sup> Wanda Granot Cole, "The Public Life and Work of Nan Sheets: Oklahoma Artist", (M.F.A. Thesis: University of Oklahoma, 1948), 3-4.

<sup>184</sup> Ralston, "Urge To Paint Thrusts City Woman Into Prominent Place As An Artist", 11-C.

1905 as the youngest ever graduate of the school.<sup>185</sup> This was certainly a notable accomplishment on its own, but it was not what the young pharmacist felt like was her true calling during her lifetime. Nan Sheets did work for several years as a pharmacist, but that is not why her time at Valparaiso University was influential on her future career.

During this formative time in her life, Nan Sheets was introduced to one of the most important relationships to her art career, her husband. It was while they were both students at Valparaiso that Fred Sheets met Nan. Four years following her graduation, the couple was married in 1909.<sup>186</sup> Eventually, Dr. Fred Sheets decided to move to Oklahoma to explore the booming oil industry. The young couple first settled in Bartlesville in 1911, but eventually moved to Oklahoma City in 1915.<sup>187</sup> The reason why Fred Sheets was so important to his wife's career revolved around his willingness to support his wife's interests outside of the home. Fred Sheets was fully supportive of all of his wife's pursuits. He assisted his wife in any way possible. As noted in 1948, Oklahoma would have potentially been robbed of Sheets' artistic influence if Fred Sheets had shown the same amount of opposition to his wife's work when compared to the amount of cooperation and support he provided her.<sup>188</sup> That was the nature of society in the 1920s that a woman had to have the support of her husband in order to pursue a public career outside of the home. Thankfully Sheets had the support of her husband throughout her career, but she was also blessed with natural artistic ability passed down to her from her mother.

To capitalize on her husband's support, Nan Sheets enrolled in summer classes in 1919 in Colorado Springs at the Broadmoor Art Academy. While at the academy, she learned from noted artist John F. Carlson on many of the fundamentals of art while her husband used the time in

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<sup>185</sup> Cole, "The Public Life and Work of Nan Sheets: Oklahoma Artist", 5.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-4.

## CULTURE ON THE PRAIRIE

Colorado as an opportunity for a fishing vacation.<sup>189</sup> From 1919 to 1925, Nan Sheets spent the summers in a variety of locations learning from various artists on the important guiding principles of art. It was during this time that Nan Sheets career as an artist began receiving national attention. This was the first for a female artist from Oklahoma, and she was considered an outsider from the traditional centers of American art located in the East like New York City.<sup>190</sup> Shortly after enrolling in art classes and receiving formal training, Nan Sheets art career began receiving national attention for the quality of her work. Most importantly to Sheets, however, was the fact that her home-state of Oklahoma loved and adored her paintings.

The first national recognition Nan Sheets received was in 1923 when she was named in *Who's Who in Art*.<sup>191</sup> By 1923, the up-and-coming artist was already making a name for herself in the art world throughout the United States. This raise to fame continued in 1924 when Sheets' artwork was honored as one of the best among the area's best artists from Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Colorado. She was honored with one of three purchase prizes at the Mid-West Artist's exhibition in Kansas City in 1924.<sup>192</sup> By the time 1927 rolled around, Sheets hosted her fifth annual art exhibit in her home gallery known as "the Elms" located in Oklahoma City. This space allowed her to display her work when she returned home from trips, and it also provided her a space to teach private art lessons.<sup>193</sup> In the twelve years since the Association of Oklahoma Artists was founded, Nan Sheets established herself as one of Oklahoma's prominent artists with recognition throughout the Eastern portion of the United States.

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>190</sup> B. Rickard Fetterman, "Nan Sheets of Oklahoma," in *The American Magazine of Art* 8, 18 (August 1927): 429.

<sup>191</sup> Ruth McCarty, "Local Artist Exhibits: Mrs. Nan Sheets Has 44 Oils Hanging This Week," *The Oklahoma News* 18, 27 (30 October 1923): 2.

<sup>192</sup> Ralston, "Urge To Paint Thrusts City Woman Into Prominent Place As An Artist", 11-C.

<sup>193</sup> "City Observance of National Art Week to Be Followed By Two Annual Exhibits," *The Oklahoma News* 22, 13 (15 October 1927): 5.

Although it was significant that Sheets was hosting her fifth annual show in her own gallery space in Oklahoma in the 1920s, there was another show that year that signified the trajectory her art career was heading. After nearly a decade of fine arts schooling from people like Hugh Breckenridge, Birger Sandzen, and John F. Carlson, Sheets was getting recognized by a fine arts educator prominently known throughout Oklahoma as the director of the Fine Arts school in Norman: Oscar B. Jacobson.<sup>194</sup> While the artwork at the show received praise from Jacobson and others, none of the artworks' names from the show are included in the newspaper article. The show was said to have included numerous scenes from Gloucester, Massachusetts in addition to floral scenes admired for the details the artist put into the overall design. Jacobson's praise was especially notable in that he claimed, "This is the nicest exhibition of the work of an artist of our own state that we ever had." Jacobson went on to even say that Sheets has done more than anyone else in Oklahoma City to establish that state's capital as a celebrated cultural community.<sup>195</sup> Jacobson's prediction for Sheets to continue to even greater things was precisely accurate.

Even in 1927, someone as notable as Oscar Jacobson was recognizing the artistic potential of Nan Sheets. He knew she was capable of amazing things artistically, but I do not think Jacobson could have predicted the role she would play in establishing museums in Oklahoma. Just four years later, Nan Sheets was again on show at the University of Oklahoma in 1931. This time her work was on display next to other notable Oklahoma artists like Oscar Jacobson and Father Gregory Gerrer.<sup>196</sup> There were countless other honors Nan Sheets accomplished between 1927 and 1931, like turning an additional portion of her home studio "the

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<sup>194</sup> "State Artist Has Work On Exhibit: Thirty Paintings Are Included In Collection Being Shown At Fine Arts Building," *The Oklahoma Daily* 12, 16 (3 December 1927): 3.

<sup>195</sup> "State Artist Has Work On Exhibit", 3.

<sup>196</sup> "65 Canvases Up As State Artist Exhibition Opens," *The Oklahoma Daily* 25, 158 (16 April 1931): 1.

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Elms” into a gallery to display artworks from artists other than herself. One of the most significant opportunities to occur during her career as an Oklahoma artist and museum professional also occurred in 1931. As Vice-President of the Association of Oklahoma Artists, Nan Sheets was asked to be the judge of the show. The article did not say why Sheets was selected for this honor, but another article captured the artist’s personality in 1931: “...of painter and saleslady; of teacher and lecturer; of art critic and hostess. People instinctively like her and fell at home in her presence, because she appears always so natural and at ease.”<sup>197</sup> This confidence in herself as an artist surely helped with her quick rise to fame and made her a natural selection to be the judge for the art show on Oklahoma’s Fair grounds.

According to the one academic work dedicated to Sheets, the Oklahoma City artist continued producing works that were prominently displayed in art shows until 1940, when her work “The Osage Nation” was bought for a show by IBM.<sup>198</sup> Even before this show occurred in San Francisco, Nan Sheets was slowly posturing herself for the next phase of her life. Some of this preparation occurred naturally through the positions she put herself in like being the judge for the Association of Oklahoma Artists exhibition. In that role, she was forced to judge the values of others art.<sup>199</sup> Whatever the role was, Sheets was an institution in the Oklahoma City art scene for her dedication to promoting the culture of her beloved hometown. She was comfortable taking a long vacation to far off places, even bringing two students with her through Italy Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and England.<sup>200</sup> However, she always returned

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<sup>197</sup> Rex F. Harlow, “Oklahoma’s Nationally Famous Artist”, *Harlow’s Weekly* 37, 12 (21 March 1931): 4.

<sup>198</sup> Cole, “The Public Life and Work of Nan Sheets: Oklahoma Artist”, 32.

<sup>199</sup> According to Wanda Granot Cole, Sheets even performed a role-reversal while judging for one of these events. As judge, she awarded first to her former teacher Birger Sandzen at the Broadmoor Art Academy. In 1922, he awarded Sheets a scholarship for her work; now almost a decade later, Sheets was returning the favor to her former instructor. I sadly leave this story as a footnote due to the fact I was unable to find anything announcing Sandzen as winner of the exhibition at the Oklahoma Free State Fair or the Kansas Free State Fair in the fall of 1930 all the way through 1933.

<sup>200</sup> Cole, “The Public Life and Work of Nan Sheets: Oklahoma Artist”, 32.



to Oklahoma to display her work. This was how the artist operated throughout the entirety of her lifetime by making a conscious effort to continue to build the art community in Oklahoma.

This strong connection to Oklahoma was epitomized by her appointment as an advisor for the Public Works Fine Arts project that was created in Oklahoma to help with unemployment issues caused by the Great Depression that occurred during the 1930s.<sup>201</sup> Due to her stature in Oklahoma art, Nan Sheets was selected as Oklahoma City's representative for the federal works program designed to assist struggling artists. According to Sheets, she stuck with the program from 1935 until federal funding dried up in 1942 at the outbreak of World War II.<sup>202</sup> After establishing the first art gallery in Oklahoma City to display other's works with the help of her husband Fred Sheets in 1930, Sheets was again tasked with creating a space for struggling artists to display their work. This time she was backed by federal funding. By 1937, her work as director at the Oklahoma City Art Center was getting noticed. One WPA official from Washington called the Oklahoma City gallery the best in the United States. Just three years later Sheets' work was being further recognized. In 1940, she was state supervisor over the entire federally funded art program.<sup>203</sup> Her dedication to the arts in Oklahoma City helped establish an art scene that eventually developed into the beginnings of the first art museum in the city. Tulsa already had the Philbrook Art Center starting in 1939, and now downtown Oklahoma City had an established art center located at the Municipal Auditorium City where exhibitions, classes, lectures, and a myriad of other events could be held.

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<sup>201</sup> O. D. Hall, "National Recovery Program in Oklahoma: To Employ Artists," *Harlow's Weekly* 42, 1 (6 January 1934): 11.

<sup>202</sup> Richard Doud, "Oral History interview with Nan Sheets", In Person, for the *Smithsonian Archives of American Art*: (4 June 1964), 4.

<sup>203</sup> "Nan Sheets Is Chosen Director Of Work Projects Art Setup," *The Daily Oklahoman* 49, 275 (9 October 1940): 13.

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Even after moving to the Municipal Auditorium in 1937, that was not enough to save the public project from having its fund cut. This cut was due to the country turning its attention to the War in Europe. So, with very little notice, federal funding for the WPA art's project dried up in 1942.<sup>204</sup> Throughout her career as an artist, Sheets was known for her work ethic sometimes working on something for ten to twelve hours at a time. With federal funding now gone from the Oklahoma City Arts Center, Nan Sheets rolled up her sleeves. Even prior to being assigned a federally funded role with the arts, Nan Sheets desired to build an established art center available to a greater number of people in Oklahoma City.<sup>205</sup> That is why the threat of closing the art center due to the loss of federal funding was not an option for the artist-turned-museum director. After consulting with notable community leaders from Oklahoma City, Nan Sheets began selling memberships to financially support the work she had started twenty years ago in her home-gallery, "the Elms."<sup>206</sup> Instead of the gallery space being out of her home, it was now on the fifth floor of the Municipal Auditorium with additional space to teach art classes.

Nan Sheets' connections with important figures in Oklahoma City's society certainly helped her continue the legacy of the art center after federal funding dried up. This was very similar to the model established in Tulsa with Waite Phillips' donation of his home to be turned into the Philbrook Art Center. In spite of the fact Sheets was dependent on outside funding and support from other notable civics leaders to keep the art center open, it was her organization that allowed the center to continue to exist. By 1945, the art center had built a nice support base for itself in Oklahoma City. Although it might be perceived as a step out of order in the traditional business sense, the art center was able to incorporate with a board of directors that year. A failed

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<sup>204</sup> Doud, "Oral History interview with Nan Sheets", 8.

<sup>205</sup> Cole, "The Public Life and Work of Nan Sheets: Oklahoma Artist", 36.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

deal between the art center and the Carnegie Public Library meant that a board of trustees connected to the art center was selected to assist with administrative issues.<sup>207</sup> Fortunately for art patrons in Oklahoma, Nan Sheets still contributed to Oklahoma City's museum culture after a twenty-year career as an artist, art educator, and now as a museum professional.

Nan Sheets already brought together Oklahoma's civic leaders to continue the art center's existence from 1942. To continue fundraising efforts for the art center, Sheets partnered with the Junior League to host the first annual Beaux Arts ball in 1946.<sup>208</sup> Held in November that year, the tickets went on sale on October 14<sup>th</sup> and were frequently advertised in the newspapers over the following weeks.<sup>209</sup> There was one relationship present during the planning of the Beaux Arts Ball that greatly impacted the way the museum was going to look over the next two decades. After volunteering at the museum after World War II, Eleanor Kirkpatrick was given the title of general chairperson of the ball.<sup>210</sup> The brief excerpt from the newspaper stated the Mrs. Kirkpatrick assisted with planning the first Beaux Arts Ball in Oklahoma City in 1946. Fortunately for the career of Nan Sheets, the Kirkpatrick's interest in the Oklahoma City Art Center was only just igniting.

Nan Sheets' career in art and in museums fulfilled the role of the tortoise in the age-old fable of "the Tortoise and the Hare." She slow played an incredible successful career over thirty years career as director of the first art center in Oklahoma City. She finally retired in 1965. The last notable contribution Nan Sheets contributed to the Oklahoma City Art Center further followed the museum model of the two notable Tulsa museums, the Philbrook Art Center and the

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<sup>207</sup> Nan Sheets, "Art Center Is Incorporated: Citizens Named as Trustees", *The Daily Oklahoman* 54, 150 (27 May 1945): 37.

<sup>208</sup> "Plans Announced For Benefit Ball," *The Daily Oklahoman* 55, 279 (13 October 1946): 73.

<sup>209</sup> "Tickets for Beaux-Arts International Ball," *The Daily Oklahoman* 55, 288 (22 October 1946): 10.

<sup>210</sup> "The Daily Oklahoma: Beaux Arts Ball", *The Daily Oklahoman* 55, 293 (27 October 1946): 74.

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Gilcrease museum. Nan Sheets took her talent as an artist and museum professional and combined it the civic interests of a wealthy citizen. After moving into the Municipal Auditorium in 1937, the Oklahoma City Art Center finally received its own building in 1958.<sup>211</sup> Sheets campaigned for a separate building for the arts in Oklahoma City indefinitely. However, the fragile situation the art center found itself in 1942 after federal funding was lost did not enable for a smooth transition into a permanent building. The Beaux Arts Ball provided some funding, but it was only enough to pay for supplies for the museum.<sup>212</sup> By the mid-1950s, a wealthy donor stepped up to fund for a new building for the art center. Although they declined an opportunity to buy a Rembrandt, John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick pledged to donate \$250,000 to the center towards a new building.<sup>213</sup> For Nan Sheets, this was the culmination of a tireless career to build Oklahoma City's cultural community into a renowned art scene.

Nan Sheets retired in 1965. Upon retiring, one of the galleries at the Oklahoma City Art Center was renamed the "Nan Sheets Gallery" in her honor.<sup>214</sup> The newspaper article stated she served as director for twenty-seven years, but her first federal appointment to assist with the WPA arrived in 1935.

Anytime someone has a career in any field that lasts forty-six years, positive results are typically associated with the career in question. Nan Sheets is no exception to this concept, and this was something admired by a majority of individuals throughout Oklahoma. However, Sheets' career as an artist and museum professional is also interesting due to the timing of her career. She started her art education in Colorado just one year before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was

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<sup>211</sup> Aline Jane Treanor, "New Home for Oklahoma Art Center Closes Door on Old Controversy", *The Daily Oklahoma* 67, 326 (27 November 1958): 13.

<sup>212</sup> Doud, "Oral History interview with Nan Sheets", 10.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> "Art Center Adding Exhibition, Gallery", *The Daily Oklahoman* 74, 121 (6 May 1965): 46.

ratified as part of the constitution. And, she ended her career just two years after Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* (the book was published in 1963). Sheets still faced gender discrimination as shown by the artist's quote saying he liked her painting because Sheets painted like a man. In spite of the fact she undoubtedly experienced sexism firsthand, Nan Sheets also benefited from her husband's success as a physician. This does not take away from her talent. Instead, Dr. Fred Sheets' financial success enabled his wife to expand her art career on several occasions. Nan Sheets' connections in the art world established by her success combined with her contacts among Oklahoma City's elite was super beneficial to her when she needed funding in 1942. Although it may seem odd that a woman in the 1920s and 1930s achieved the fame and success that Nan Sheets did, it does not have anything to do with Oklahoma having a unique culture.

Nan Sheets certainly benefitted from the fact that there were few well-known artists from Oklahoma. By the time she started her painting career in Oklahoma in the 1920s, the biggest names in Oklahoma art were Oscar Jacobson and Fr. Gregory Gerrer. Represented by a Swedish immigrant and a priest, Sheets was one of the first artists from the state's capital to make a name for themselves artistically. It also helped to be on good terms with the director of the school of art at the University of Oklahoma. Jacobson's admiration for Sheets' work is well documented when he referred to an exhibition of her works as the "nicest from of an artist of our own state that we ever had" in 1927.

There are certain undeniable facts legitimizing the success Sheets experienced during her career. Even if her career benefitted from Oklahoma's weirdness or not, the important thing to consider with Nan Sheets is the body of her work. As founding director who served for thirty

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years at the Oklahoma City's first art center and even as a largely successful artist, Nan Sheets' career speaks for itself.

**John & Eleanor Kirkpatrick: Inducted in 1962 & 1975**<sup>215</sup>

**Institution(s) Represented: Oklahoma Art Center; Oklahoma City Museum of Art; Science Museum Oklahoma; Kirkpatrick Foundation**



Photo courtesy of *The Gateway to Oklahoma History* located at the Oklahoma Historical Center.<sup>216</sup>

In many ways, John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick represented the future of Oklahoma museums when they made their first substantial donation in the 1950s. That donation was to Nan Sheets and the Oklahoma City Art Center to build a permanent space. It activated a philanthropic giant that still exists in Oklahoma today. When asked how it felt to donate a quarter of a million dollars, Eleanor responded by saying, “It’s nice that it was available to be used like this. We’ve needed this building for so long.” She went on to comment that Oklahoma City finally stood a fighting chance in receiving art collections from collectors when they were broken up.<sup>217</sup> The

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<sup>215</sup> Full disclosure: I was employed for almost a month as an archive processor at the Kirkpatrick Family Archive, and I had the opportunity to meet Christian Keese. He is John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick’s grandson. My opinion of the Kirkpatrick Foundation is informed from this brief time.

<sup>216</sup> Cliff King, “Photograph 2012.201.B0335.0210”, photograph, (5 December 1958), Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, *The Gateway to Oklahoma History*, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

<sup>217</sup> Nichols, *John & Eleanor: A Sense of Community*, 162. Nichols quoted an article from the *Oklahoma City Times* (6 December 1958) that I was unable to locate.

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Kirkpatrick's continued to find ways to have money available for their charitable interests. As the twentieth century went on, the Kirkpatrick's continued to give.

With the Kirkpatrick Foundation's founding around the time of the first big donation, the Kirkpatrick's figured out what their interests were. Thomas Gilcrease wanted to build a museum telling American history with an emphasis on the Native America, but the Kirkpatrick's wanted to improve science and art education in Oklahoma.<sup>218</sup> This goal shaped the decisions made by the Kirkpatrick's, and it brought them intimately close with several aspects of Oklahoma's museum culture. As already demonstrated, the Kirkpatrick's assisted Nan Sheets' goal of building a permanent art center in Oklahoma City. When the building opened, the Art Center only occupied about half the space. To avoid letting the space sit empty, the Kirkpatrick's provided funds for additional activities to be organized. This was accomplished through the Oklahoma Science and Arts Foundation. The Kirkpatrick's utilized this organization as early as 1959 to bring exhibits specific to science to the new Art Center.<sup>219</sup>

After the additional donation in 1958, the Kirkpatrick's made another sizable donation on the fairgrounds. This was the same location of their original donation. Adding to the space, the Kirkpatrick Foundation constructed a 38,500 square foot space to house ballet and art classrooms plus additional gallery space for exhibitions.<sup>220</sup> The biggest addition to the space was Oklahoma City's own planetarium. This was all offered by John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick and estimated to cost \$400,000.<sup>221</sup> This additional space at the fairgrounds allowed the foundation and the Kirkpatrick's to further their charitable goal of further science education in the state.<sup>222</sup> In less

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<sup>218</sup> "Many Await Horse Show", *The Norman Transcript* 72, 241 (20 April 1961): 5.

<sup>219</sup> "Tinker Shows 'Space-Age' With Exhibit", *The Daily Oklahoman* 68, 257 (19 September 1959): 4.

<sup>220</sup> "New Building To Be Ready for 1962 Oklahoma State Fair", *The Democrat News* 53, 31 (24 May 1962): 1.

<sup>221</sup> Nichols, *John & Eleanor: A Sense of Community*, 177.

<sup>222</sup> "Oklahoma City Planetarium Show Starts", *The Kiowa County-Star Review* 38, 19 (22 February 1962): 9.



than a decade, the Kirkpatrick's donated nearly three-quarters of a million dollars to Oklahoma City's museum infrastructure by providing funds for an art center and space for science education. In that time, they also made sure to donate to countless other Oklahoma organizations. This became the identity of the Kirkpatrick family beginning in the 1950s. "We seldom contribute to activities outside of Oklahoma," John Kirkpatrick wrote in 1959.<sup>223</sup> This statement was reinforced again in the 1970s.

In 1976, John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick decided again to display their charitable interests by making another sizable donation to the city. *The Daily Oklahoman* announced in 1977 that the new Kirkpatrick Center was set to open next to the Oklahoma City Zoo. What was the Kirkpatrick Center? Anyone around my age recognizes this building as the Omniplex, but it started out at the Kirkpatrick Center in 1977. In addition to a science museum, the building housed the Oklahoma City Zoo administration offices, the American Indian Institute, the Oklahoma Zoological Society, and the Oklahoma aviation museum. This was the new home of Oklahoma Science and Arts Foundation.<sup>224</sup> Over nearly two decades, John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick showed they financially supported Oklahoma City's cultural community. Like Thomas Gilcrease, they partnered their financial success with the appropriate professionals to make the most of their philanthropy. What started as a \$250,000 donation continues today throughout Oklahoma (and now additional states like Colorado and Texas) to the sum of \$20 million given to numerous non-profit organizations.<sup>225</sup> When you are allocating that kind of

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<sup>223</sup> Nichols, *John & Eleanor: A Sense of Community*, 164. Nichols quoted this from a report written by John Kirkpatrick in 1959.

<sup>224</sup> Pat Upton, "Grand Opening of Kirkpatrick Center Slated Feb. 13", *The Daily Oklahoman* (13 August 1977): 11. The first curator of the Oklahoma Aviation Hall of Fame was Clarence E. Page. He was a World War I veteran, and he was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1983.

<sup>225</sup> Kirkpatrick Family Fund, Kirkpatrick Foundation, Christian Keese Charitable Trust, Kirkpatrick Bank, Kirkpatrick Oil Company, The Brett Weston Archive, Kirkpatrick Family Archive, Kirkpatrick Policy Group, Beekman New York, "From the Bridge: 2018 & 2019 Annual Reports", (Oklahoma City: Kirkpatrick Foundation, 2019), 9.

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money, your impact is well demonstrated by a number of the cultural institutions throughout the state even including the Fr. Gregory's famous collection located at the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art.<sup>226</sup>

John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick represented private citizens committed to building Oklahoma's cultural community. They fall well in line with the philanthropic individuals mentioned like Laura Clubb, Waite Phillips, and Thomas Gilcrease. John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick learned from the examples these individuals set when it came to building Oklahoma's museum culture. In many cases, they followed in these individuals' footsteps by making similar contributions. Like Clubb, Phillips, and Gilcrease, the Kirkpatrick wealth originated from the oil industry. Excluding the Kirkpatrick's for a moment, Oklahoma's museum contributions were generally donated en masse up to the 1950s. Huge donations from Laura Clubb and Waite Phillips were completed relatively quickly, with Waite Phillips's donation taking more time due to renovations. The difference was that the Kirkpatrick's committed to building Oklahoma indefinitely. For better or for worse, this commitment strongly continues today. For the sake of Oklahoma's cultural institutions, hopefully the commitment continues for the foreseeable future.

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<sup>226</sup> "OKLAHOMA SCIENCE & ARTS FOUNDATION, INC. (Menne the Mummy)", Postcard, (ca. 1975), DUN.2017.07.01.527, John Dunning III Collection, Metropolitan Library, Oklahoma City, OK.

**Woody Crumbo: Inducted in 1978**

**Institution(s) Represented: Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art; Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art**



Photo courtesy of *The Gateway to Oklahoma History* located at the Oklahoma Historical Center.<sup>227</sup>

Out of the ten individuals featured, the individual I felt most connected to was Woody Crumbo. Coincidentally, he is also the individual whose story was the hardest to pin-point. There is no Woody Crumbo autobiography providing an in-depth look inside the talented artist's mind. There is not a series of interviews conducted with a national-recognized magazine. Given the opportunity to make a movie about his life from his son-in-law, Woody Crumbo declined.<sup>228</sup> According to Native American tradition, the storyteller was responsible for keeping tribal history alive. Woody Crumbo related to this tradition, where the storyteller was the tribal historian. The most accurate depiction of Woody Crumbo's influence comes from the story's others tell about him. Robert Perry compiled stories from Woody Crumbo's wife, Lillian, his children, and a number of friends and colleagues that knew Crumbo throughout his lifetime. Those that knew

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<sup>227</sup> Jim Argo, "Woody Crumbo", photograph, (July 1984), Jim Argo Collection, *The Gateway to Oklahoma History*, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

<sup>228</sup> Robert Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art* (Ada, OK: Chickasha Press, 2009), 21.

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him claimed he would not hurt anyone's feelings nor say any unkind words to another person.<sup>229</sup> The following stories demonstrate Woody Crumbo's kindness and generosity, but they also demonstrate his importance to Oklahoma's cultural community. For all his contributions, sharing stories rather than dates, facts, and events tell a more complete story of Woody Crumbo, from his generosity to his success as an artist.<sup>230</sup> These stories demonstrate Woody Crumbo's importance as a key figure to the history of Oklahoma's art museums.

Woodrow Wilson "Woody" Crumbo enjoyed over five decades of success as an artist, educator, and museum curator. Crumbo did not have any financial success in the oil industry, even though he partnered with Thomas Gilcrease in 1945. His partner was not a physician that converted their home into an art gallery while he was away on a summer art trip.<sup>231</sup> Even though his significant other did not provide him with a studio and gallery space, he was still a professional artist. He was recruited by Thomas Gilcrease to be an artist-in-residence and also to help the oilman establish a collection for a future museum.

Before any opportunity he had artistically, Crumbo went through forced assimilation at the hands of the United States government. He attended Chilocco Indian School in Northern Oklahoma beginning in the mid-1920s.<sup>232</sup> While being forced into assimilation, Woody Crumbo's leadership qualities were recognized before his artistic abilities. In 1930, Woody Crumbo started classes at the American Indian Institute for Outstanding Native American males in Wichita, Kansas.<sup>233</sup> It was his time in Wichita that introduced him to some of the most

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<sup>229</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 23.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Absolutely no disrespect intended to Nan Sheets.

<sup>232</sup> See: K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994) for more information on the practices at Chilocco Indian school. According to Crumbo's wife, Lillian, his short time at the school shaped how Woody lived the remainder of his life. He woke up at 6:15am every morning until the day he died. (Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 48.)

<sup>233</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 49.

important people during his lifetime. His roommate, Scott Tonemah, was a Kiowa from Anadarko. Through his friendship with Scott Tonemah, Woody Crumbo met many significant names in Native American art including the male members of the Kiowa Six, Susie Peters, Belo Cozad, and Wooden Lance, the Kiowa chief at the time. This shaped Woody Crumbo artistically and spiritually.

Although Woody Crumbo was not a member of the Kiowa Nation by birth, he went home with Scott Tonemah to Anadarko when school was on break. During this time, Woody Crumbo learned directly from a majority of the Kiowa Six about Native American dances, the regalia worn during the dances, and their symbolic meanings.<sup>234</sup> This was a formal education of Kiowa traditions, and it fell in line with Native American tradition of passing down things orally. For Woody Crumbo, he gained numerous mentors and friends that were willing to assist him. To fully signify Woody Crumbo's acceptance by the Kiowas, his relationship with Belo Cozad represented how the members of the Kiowa Nation truly felt about the young Potawatomie artist.<sup>235</sup>

Belo Cozad was important to Native American society because he was the Keeper of the Sacred Flute for the Kiowa Nation. This was a lifelong appointment. In addition to being an important mentor to several members of the Kiowa Six, Cozad was an important mentor to Woody Crumbo.<sup>236</sup> As a Kiowa elder, Cozad clearly witnessed Crumbo's desire to learn Native

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<sup>234</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 55.

<sup>235</sup> The Kiowa Chief Wooden Lance also saw greatness in Woody Crumbo. At Christmas in 1931, Wooden Lance gave Crumbo a sacred set of bow and arrows the belonged to Chief Santana. He was the last Kiowa to raid into Texas in 1874. Wooden Lance gave the gift to Crumbo after holding on to it for fifty years. He recognized Woody Crumbo as the right warrior to receive the gift due to his spiritual strength. Wooden Lance served as his spiritual mentor with the assistance of Belo Cozad until August 1931 when Wooden Lance passed away. (See Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 51-9.)

<sup>236</sup> Monroe Tsatoke, *Belo Cozad*, Opaque watercolor on paper, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Arthur and Shifra Silberman Collection, displayed at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, *Kiowa Agency: Stories of the Six*, Norman, OK.

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American traditions. Belo Cozad also witnessed young members of his own tribe reject and forget their own tribal identity.<sup>237</sup> Not long after Easter 1931, Cozad invited Woody Crumbo to his house. After a night of praying and meditating, Cozad showed Crumbo how to craft a flute at dawn. The whole experience now meant that Woody Crumbo was a medicine man. Not only was Crumbo a medicine man for the Kiowa, but Crumbo received Cozad's good spirit in the ceremony. Crumbo was selected because Cozad identified him as a "holy person with an empowerment of healing."<sup>238</sup> The weight of this honor was not lost on Crumbo, but there was another relationship from Anadarko that shared equal importance to the newly ordained medicine man's artistic career.

By 1930, the Kiowa Six gained name recognition throughout the United States for their art. In fact, Oscar Jacobson published a portfolio in 1929 called *Kiowa Indian Art: Watercolor Paintings in Color by the Indians of Oklahoma*. Published in Nice, France, the Kiowa art received attention from numerous continents beginning in the 1930s. When Woody Crumbo was introduced to the famous Kiowa artists, they were just returning from Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremony in New Mexico. Crumbo loved hearing about the artists' success in New Mexico, but this meeting also introduced him to Susie Peters. Peters found the Kiowa Six and successfully persuaded the University of Oklahoma art department to professionally educate the group.<sup>239</sup> From 1926 to 1929, there were various members of the Kiowa group enrolled in special art classes in Norman. The group included Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, Jack Hokeah, Stephen Mopope, Monroe Tsatoke, and Lois Smoky, the only female of the group. Woody Crumbo witnessed their successes firsthand from 1930 moving forward. By 1932, he was one of their

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<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>239</sup> Ruth Robinson, "Kiowa Indian Artists Record Tribal History and Traditions in State Murals", *The Oklahoma News* 31, 137 (21 February 1937) : 6-C.

contemporaries when Susie Peters managed to sell 22 of Woody Crumbo's paintings to the San Francisco Museum of Art.<sup>240</sup> For all the help she provided Crumbo, he spoke in high regards of Peters throughout his career. According to Robert Perry, Crumbo referred to her as the "Mother of Indian Art in Oklahoma."<sup>241</sup> His admiration for Susie Peters did not hold him back from future opportunities while receiving his art education.

Woody Crumbo was finally a professional artist. In 1932 during the midst of the Great Depression, Woody Crumbo had more money than he had ever had before when a significant portion of the United States was suffering economically.<sup>242</sup> Woody Crumbo continued painting, and he also performed as an Indian dancer throughout the country. Unfortunately, this was not enough to keep him in Wichita. Financial issues forced Crumbo to move from Wichita to Norman for school in 1936. Here he benefited from in-state tuition and an art scholarship. It also meant that Crumbo would be taught by Oscar Jacobson.

Before Woody Crumbo even arrived in Norman, Oscar Jacobson already taught the Kiowa Six and Acee Blue Eagle. He published a well-publicized portfolio featuring the work of his Kiowa students at the University of Oklahoma. By most accounts, Jacobson was a successful art educator and artist by the 1930s. Jacobson's claims while marketing the Native American artists were interesting at times. For Susie Peters, she took offense to Jacobson's claims that he was the one who identified their artistic ability.<sup>243</sup> In Jeanne d'Ucel's unpublished manuscript, Jacobson's wife refers to Susie Peters as "Mrs. P". According to d'Ucel, Peters went around

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<sup>240</sup> I reached out to the San Francisco Museum of Art via phone, and I left a message with their collections department. As of 10/18/20, I have not received a call back. I am waiting on the microfilm from the Archives of American Art.

<sup>241</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 64.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Oscar Brousse Jacobson, *Kiowa Indian Art: Watercolor Paintings in Color by the Indians of Oklahoma*, (Nice, France: C. Szwedzicki, 1929), Western History Collections (WHC), University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, OK, 8.

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reviling Jacobson due to the fact she was under the impression the University was paying him a double salary for his work with the Native Americans and for his traditional role as a professor.<sup>244</sup> For the Kiowa Six, they had mostly moved on from Norman at this point. The rift between Peters and Jacobson did not impact their careers, but the opportunity was there for their rift to cause issues with Woody Crumbo's career. There is no indication as to whether or not Peters influenced Crumbo's time at OU. However, Crumbo's and Jacobson's relationship had its own tension to deal with. Whether the professor was ever alerted to Crumbo's true feelings to him remains unknown, but Crumbo's true feelings about Jacobson did not come to light until after the Potawatomi artists passed away in 1989.

Crumbo's interesting relationship with Oscar Jacobson proved several things. It proved Crumbo's true abilities as a painter. When he arrived at OU and learned that Jacobson was purchasing student's art for only \$10, Crumbo was incensed.<sup>245</sup> He successfully sold art in 1932, and Crumbo knew Native American art was worth more than \$10 per piece. In the collection at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, there is only one piece of art from Woody Crumbo that came into the collection while Crumbo was a student. According to the database, the painting *Indian Family* was a museum acquisition in 1937. How much was the painting acquired for? Ten Dollars.<sup>246</sup> Most likely, this was the first piece of art Crumbo completed while he was a student at OU. It was also the artwork that alerted Crumbo to how Jacobson managed his Native American students at OU. The only other work completed by Woody Crumbo from around the time he was a student was purchased in 1939. Instead of purchasing the work from the artist, the

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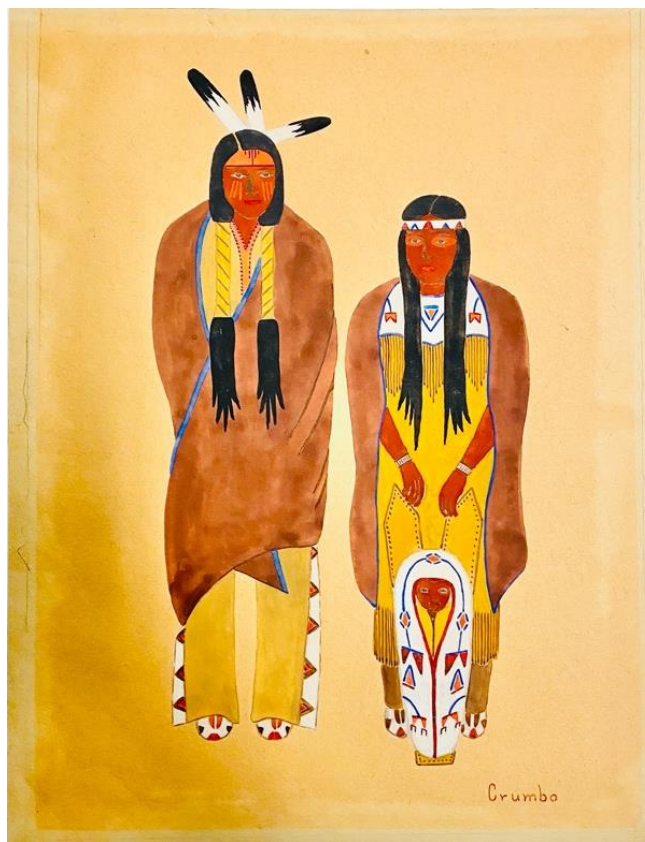
<sup>244</sup> Jeanne d'Ucel, *About Indians*, Unpublished Manuscript, Box 1, Folder 5, Oscar B. Jacobson Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), Oklahoma City, OK, 26.

<sup>245</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 84.

<sup>246</sup> Woody Crumbo, *Indian Family*,



museum bought it from Book Exchange.<sup>247</sup> This work was purchased for \$12.50. These are the only two paintings from Woody Crumbo in the Fred Jones, Jr Museum of Art Collection that overlap with the artist's time spent at the University of Oklahoma. Here is Crumbo's *Indian Family*:



Picture taken by the author.<sup>248</sup>

Completed in 1937, the influence of the Kiowa 6 is clear on Woody Crumbo's artwork at this point in his career.

To prevent his paintings from being purchased for less than they were worth, Crumbo turned in high-quality, but unfinished art projects. This resulted in him getting a mediocre grade, which was unacceptable to the art department. As a scholarship student, Professor Jacobson and

<sup>247</sup> "Museum Acquisitions 1932-1943: Art School Collection", *Museum History* Volume 1, Fred Jones, Jr Museum of Art Library, Norman, OK. The book exchange was the university's bookstore at least through 1963.

<sup>248</sup> Woody Crumbo, *Indian Family*, Tempera, 1937, Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

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the rest of the professors had higher expectations for Crumbo. He received the opportunity to finish the paintings at home and return them to be graded again. Crumbo did finish the work at home, but he did not want his finished work to be sold for less than it was worth. Instead, Woody Crumbo entered his completed works into the 8<sup>th</sup> annual art exhibition featuring works from Oklahoma artists hosted in Tulsa in 1937.<sup>249</sup> Participants in the competition included several of Crumbo's classmates and instructors from the University of Oklahoma. Some of the notable names in Oklahoma art include Leonard Good, Joseph Taylor, Dorothy Kirk, Craig Sheppard, and John O'Neil. They all posed strong competition to Crumbo's three paintings that he submitted.<sup>250</sup> In a contest against his peers and "superiors", Woody Crumbo won one of two purchase prizes for the show for his painting *Hunted*. Here it is below:



Picture from the Philbrook Museum of Art Website.<sup>251</sup>

<sup>249</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 84-5.

<sup>250</sup> "Good, Crumbo Given Awards For Paintings in State Show", *The Oklahoma Daily* 23, 66 (7 December 1937): 1.

<sup>251</sup> Woody Crumbo, *Hunted*, Watercolor on paper, 1938, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK, Gift of the Tulsa Art Association.

According to *The Oklahoma Daily*, Leonard Good won the other purchase prize for his watercolor; second place went to Joseph Taylor, assistant professor of art; and third place went to Oliver Meeks, another OU student. Woody Crumbo did get a “C” that semester, but he also demonstrated his true artistic abilities by placing higher than Professor Taylor.

Although winning an award over several professors from the University of Oklahoma was nice, Crumbo was still unable to accept only \$10 for his art. For someone who was a professional artist prior to coming to school, Crumbo was accustomed to his paintings fetching more than \$10. However, Crumbo was not simply upset because his artwork was being undervalued. Woody Crumbo was upset with Jacobson’s treatment of the entire art class.<sup>252</sup> This was confirmed when you look through the museum’s acquisition records. Between 1932 and 1943, there were countless paintings bought by the museum from numerous Native American artists like Jake Hokeah and Acee Blue Eagle. The price paid by the museum was never more than \$15.<sup>253</sup> It was unknown if other Native American artists shared similar feelings towards Oscar Jacobson. So, the question remains, why did Crumbo not say anything if he felt as strongly as he did about how Oscar Jacobson treated the students?

As mentioned, Woody Crumbo was a kind and generous man during his lifetime. He was also an ally to other artists, and he was aware of their feelings and emotions. While a student at the University of Oklahoma, Woody Crumbo was friends with a number of the other students in the art department. In fact, Woody Crumbo fashioned his home as an artists’ hangout. He mounted a red light on the porch of one of his Norman homes luring creative artists to the house.<sup>254</sup> One of the artists that Woody befriended while at OU was Craig Sheppard. Sheppard

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<sup>252</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo’s Indian Art*, 84.

<sup>253</sup> “Museum Acquisitions 1932-1943: Art School Collection”.

<sup>254</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo’s Indian Art*, 86.

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and Crumbo's friendship was defined by the time the two spent together painting and talking all night. By morning, both the young artists' completed paintings leaned against the walls in the house.<sup>255</sup> Craig Sheppard even opened his family's home to Crumbo in Lawton on school breaks. After Sheppard graduated in Spring 1938, Woody Crumbo invited him to go on a summer art trip. Crumbo's sister invited her brother to use a cabin high in the Uintah Mountains in Utah that was seldom used. The young artists quickly devised a plan to help them raise money for their extended trip to the mountains. Whether Jacobson's practices toward the student art forced Sheppard and Crumbo to be creative with their fundraising efforts is unknown. That did not prevent the two from using their creativity to find a solution for their lack of finances.

The creativity between the two conceived the idea to paint a mural. According to Crumbo's friend Nat Kaplan, the mural was six feet high by twelve feet long on a piece of white linoleum. Named *Buffalo Hunt*, Sheppard and Crumbo sold that piece as a tourist attraction to a local hotel manager.<sup>256</sup> In 2010, the mural was donated to the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art where it still remains today. Painted in 1938, one can only imagine what the artists' artistic influences were for the painting. The scene depicts Native American men on horseback preparing for a hunt. There are also some unnatural things about the mural. For example, the winged eagle at the top, the columns on the side, and the image on the warrior's shield share similarities with the ancient Roman traditions. In 1938, German imperialism also utilized an eagle for its imagery. Artistic influences aside, the questions remained as to why Woody Crumbo's friendship with Craig Sheppard was important. An image of the mural in collections at the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art in Norman is below:

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<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-3.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.



Picture taken by the author.<sup>257</sup>

Other than their friendship producing an interesting mural, Craig Sheppard was the reason that Woody Crumbo did not speak up to Oscar Jacobson. As demonstrated by their artwork and relationship in general, the two artistically understood each other. The two clearly admired and appreciated the other's time and opinion. Woody Crumbo failed to confront Oscar Jacobson and his practices because his close friend Craig Sheppard was interested romantically in Oscar Jacobson's daughter, Yolande.<sup>258</sup> Sheppard eventually married Yolande Jacobson in 1941, and the couple moved to Montana.<sup>259</sup> This demonstrated Woody Crumbo's kindness

<sup>257</sup> Woody Crumbo, and Craig Sheppard, *Buffalo Hunt (Mural Segment from Norman Courts Motel, Polychrome linocut, 1938*, Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK Gift of Zachary Moffit.

<sup>258</sup> Perry, "Early Life," in *Woody Crumbo*, 31.

<sup>259</sup> "Rites of Interest Are Held in Many Cities of Oklahoma", *The Daily Oklahoman* 50, 159 (15 June 1941): 7-C.

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towards his friends. He was willing to pause his own mission, his dream of raising the standards of aboriginal art from folk to fine.<sup>260</sup> For the purpose of this project, it demonstrated Woody Crumbo's educational pedigree when examining his contribution to Oklahoma's art museums.

Educationally, Woody Crumbo learned under Oscar Brousse Jacobson. Questionable acquisition practices aside, his leadership as an art educator and as a museum director established the cultural community in Norman. Due to his hard work building Oklahoma's artistic community, Jacobson certainly deserves his credit for building up the art department in Norman and for encouraging artists from every background that practiced art representing realism, impressionism, and even more modern ideas like cubism and other abstract art methods. There is no denying he provided a platform for Native American artists during the 1920s and 1930s when the First American culture was under attack in the United States. Whereas there were numerous artists that went on to have successful careers from the University of Oklahoma, Woody Crumbo's succeeded in spite of his feelings toward his instructors. As was the case with the art show in 1937 in Tulsa, Crumbo relied on his artwork to prove his true abilities. He left OU in 1938 before graduating to be head of the art department at Bacone Indian College in Muskogee. He filled the vacancy after Acee Blue Eagle, another Native American artist with connections to Jacobson, left to focus his attention on his own work. Crumbo's next huge career breakthrough in a museum occurred in 1945 with the help of Thomas Gilcrease.

As documented by Thomas Gilcrease's section, the Gilcrease Museum was the brainchild of the partial-Creek oilman. Gilcrease's first museum opened in 1942 in San Antonio, but he moved it to Tulsa by 1945.<sup>261</sup> This was the year Thomas Gilcrease hired Woody Crumbo.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> "Rare Art Secret is Held by O.U. Indian", *The Daily Oklahoman* 46, 136 (23 May 1937): 7-D.

<sup>261</sup> See *Thomas Gilcrease*, page 65.

<sup>262</sup> "Crumbo Working Under Foundation Art Fellowship", *The Oklahoma Daily* 32, 42 (10 November 1945): 6.

What led Thomas Gilcrease to hire a foreman at the Douglas Aircraft foundry in Tulsa? After three years in charge at Bacone, Crumbo spent World War II painting camouflage for an aircraft company in Tulsa. By the time Gilcrease looked to hire Woody Crumbo, he had over a decade of experience being a professional artist. He was also awarded the prestigious Julius Rosenwald Foundation Art Scholarship. He received the award because he was demonstrating promise artistically.<sup>263</sup> What truly drew Thomas Gilcrease to the Native American artist was the shared vision the two had. Woody Crumbo's career continued the upward trajectory it was on when he left the University of Oklahoma without a degree.

By Fall 1945, Woody Crumbo was employed by Thomas Gilcrease as an artist and to help the oilman build the collection for his growing museum. To further show Crumbo's opinion on writing things down, his agreement with Thomas Gilcrease was purely verbal. Crumbo's impact on the Gilcrease museum was best described through the artist's presence in the museum's collections. The collection currently has 137 works of Crumbo's at the museum in Tulsa.<sup>264</sup> This obviously built Crumbo's reputation as an artist, but how did his time at the Gilcrease positively impact his career in museums? According to an unsigned letter from the Gilcrease museum archive, Thomas Gilcrease chose Woody Crumbo because of his education, and his understanding of Native American life to build a "tremendous collection of Indian art and artifacts."<sup>265</sup> One of Woody Crumbo's most notable contributions to the Gilcrease museum was his advice to Thomas Gilcrease about purchasing art from Joseph Henry Sharp. Over the span of several years, Gilcrease purchased over 100 paintings from Sharp, and the two developed

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<sup>263</sup> "Rosenwald Fund Fellowships Worth \$85,500 Listed", *Chicago Tribune* 104, 20 (20 May 1945): 4 (Part 6).

<sup>264</sup> "Online Collections", *Gilcrease Museum*.

<sup>265</sup> Perry, *Uprising! Woody Crumbo's Indian Art*, 141.

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a friendship.<sup>266</sup> When the Gilcrease Museum formally opened its doors in 1949, Joseph Henry Sharp's paintings were some of the first to go on the walls with a retrospective exhibit.<sup>267</sup>

The fact that Sharp's work was featured in Gilcrease's museum opening demonstrated Thomas Gilcrease's trust in Woody Crumbo. First, due to the fact he bought so many pieces of Joseph Henry Sharp's work, it showed he valued Woody Crumbo's opinion. His first purchase of 88 paintings was made in October 1945 when the pair traveled to Taos to specifically buy the work. The next purchase came a year later after Crumbo was hired as an artist-in-residence. Next, because Thomas Gilcrease chose artwork compiled by his partnership with Crumbo to feature on opening night, it further demonstrated Thomas Gilcrease's trust in Crumbo's artistic knowledge. It is fair to say that Gilcrease's friendship with Joseph Henry Sharp also played a part in the decision to feature the New Mexico artist with a retrospective exhibit during the museum's opening.

Within a span of a decade, Woody Crumbo worked with two of the biggest influences in Native American art, specifically when it comes to preserving it. Even before spending extended time learning from Jacobson and working with Gilcrease, Woody Crumbo already formed strong opinions regarding art. He said, "The Indian must not lose his true art instinct to please other people."<sup>268</sup> This opinion in 1937 transitioned with Crumbo to his partnership with Thomas Gilcrease from 1945 to 1948. Not only did Woody Crumbo build Oklahoma's museum history through his connections with Thomas Gilcrease, but he also helped establish a new idea in Oklahoma's museums. Until Woody Crumbo's death in 1989, he built Oklahoma's cultural foundation and added an important part of Oklahoma's culture to the mainstream. As a proud

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<sup>266</sup> "Joseph Henry Sharp", *The Santa Fe New Mexican* 100, 262 (2 October 1949): 16. Thomas Gilcrease attended Joseph Henry Sharp's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 1949.

<sup>267</sup> "Among Artists in Northern New Mexico", *The Santa Fe New Mexican* 100, 286 (30 October 1949): 12.

<sup>268</sup> "Rare Art Secret is Held by O.U. Indian", 7-D.



Native American, Woody Crumbo incorporated telling Oklahoma's history from the forgotten American's perspective. The current trend for the future of Oklahoma museums largely deals with representing Native American culture as a keystone part of the Oklahoma philosophy.<sup>269</sup> Crumbo pre-dated this trend in the state's museums. In the end, Woody Crumbo successfully brought Native American art to the forefront of America's artistic consciousness.

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<sup>269</sup> Bradley Fritch, Interview with Dr. Bob Blackburn, (19 August 2020), In Person.

### **Chapter 3: Exhibiting the Hall of Fame Inductees**

The list in the last chapter highlighted how the ten individuals contributed to Oklahoma's museums. Each individual left their marks on Oklahoma history while building up the state's museum tradition through the twentieth century. Commemorating both the state's museums and the individuals, an exhibit will display the portraits of several of the individuals on the list. Portraits and busts with accompanying labels were used to physically represent these individuals in the 'Story of the Portraits' located on the third floor at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord Pickens Museum. The goal was to include as many of the individuals as possible, but I was also tasked with working with the existing collection. In some cases, loans were available to acquire objects to tell a more complete story through the physical exhibit. However, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a virtual exhibit was configured. This allows for every museum contributor to be included, either physically in the museum or virtually on the website.

The portraits, busts, and labels from the physical exhibit in the museum in combination with the virtual portion aim to tell the story of Oklahoma's museums from the founding of the state's historical society prior to statehood to the establishment of Oklahoma's artistic community during the twentieth century. Similar to the state's unique history including pre-Columbian Native Americans, Spanish explorers, Native Americans forced from their homelands, and then subsequent repossession of the land by white settlers, Oklahoma's museum contributors during the twentieth century each offer their own diverse story. Represented in this exhibit are a Benedictine monk whose parents fled France when he was an infant; arguably the greatest female art collector in the 1920s; a Swedish immigrant interested in Native American art with a conflicting legacy; the woman who established Oklahoma City's Artistic community; an orphaned Native American artist who became a medicine man for the Kiowa Nation; four

individuals who donated countless dollars to Oklahoma’s cultural community; and, most importantly, the woman who defined what it meant to be an “Okie.”

While it might not always be pretty as recent literature suggests, Oklahoma pride was a core-tenant of the state since the 1920s when “Oklahoma Day” was first celebrated. These ten individuals accepted Oklahoma and built up the state’s museums with their talent and with financial support generated from Oklahoma’s oil and gas industry.

**Goals:**

The goals of the exhibit in its simplest form are to provide a physical representation of this work. As an employee of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord Pickens Museum (OHOF), I was afforded the unique opportunity to curate an exhibit that will be on display beginning at the end of January 2021. In Oklahoma, the OHOF was the appropriate institution to display this exhibit. With a mission of preserving the state’s history by telling its citizens stories, the exhibit is central to the museum’s mission.

The following list provides more detailed examples describing the overall goals of this exhibit:

- This exhibit aims to be a celebration of Oklahoma’s unique museum history; up until this moment, the state’s museum history was largely overlooked.
  - For a state that advertises there are more than 500 museums here, it felt odd that this history was not covered other than a museum guide in the 1980s.
- The exhibit aims to present easily accessible information designed to generate interest in Oklahoma’s museums.
- The exhibit functions as a rotation of the ‘Story of the Portraits.’
  - The hope is that rotating the portraits provided fresh experiences for guests and repeat field trips.

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- This exhibit utilizes portraits and busts plus their didactic labels to tell the history of Oklahoma museums.
  - The objects are either currently in the collection or available through loan.
- Virtual Exhibit → For guests unable/uncomfortable with coming into the museum, a virtual component will be designed.
  - A virtual exhibit allows provides the opportunity to tell a more complete story regarding Oklahoma's art museums in the twentieth century.

### **Learning Objectives:**

The Oklahoma Hall of Fame at the Gaylord Pickens Museum operates as a Blue Star Museum. Under normal circumstances, this means that the museum offers free admission on a certain portion of its days. This program was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame offered free admission since reopening. Free admission is continuing through the end of 2020. Additionally, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame offers several 'Free Family Fun' programs designed to accomplish the museums mission of telling Oklahoma's story through its people. 'Free Family Fun' is a cornerstone of Hall of Fame programing, and it even has been turned into a virtual setting through several different formats. Overall, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame strives to educate Oklahoma's youth on the uniqueness and diversity of Oklahoma history. As a result of the museum's typical audience, the physical exhibit must be accessible for younger children. To help accomplish the learning objectives, a program is included for tour guides to utilize when a field trip group is in the museum. To cater to the older audience, the virtual exhibit provides additional information to tell more of the story included in the written body of this project. Generally, this exhibit was designed to appeal to an audience of all ages.

The learning objectives are below:

- After viewing this exhibit, guests will be able to:
  - Identify important art museums in Oklahoma’s history.
  - Determine the important figures in the history of Oklahoma’s art museums.
  - Grasp the connections present throughout the history of Oklahoma’s museums.

**Timeline:**

The exhibit is still in the planning stages with the staff at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. As a result, a general timeline has been included to fully detail the work schedule.<sup>270</sup> The exhibit will open on January 19, and it will run through August 28. The rest of the timeline is below:

- Exhibit Proposal Meeting: November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 at 10:00am
  - A name for the exhibit will be finalized at this meeting.
- Objects Deadline: November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- Physical Exhibit Layout Deadline: November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- Label Deadline for Edits: December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020
- Virtual Exhibit Deadline: December 31, 2020
- Exhibit Install: January 15, 2021 to January 18, 2021

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<sup>270</sup> This timeline will be updated following November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Objects:**

As a Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma edition relies on portraits as the physical representation depicting the inductees. The ‘Story of the Portraits’ Gallery on the third floor provides our museum the opportunity to spotlight different Hall of Fame inductees by producing an informational panel next to the portrait. Past editions of ‘Story of the Portraits’ include *Beyond the Portraits: Artists and Their Subjects* and *Oklahoma Hall of Fame Service Members*. Relying on the research from the first two chapters of this work, this edition of ‘Story of the Portraits’ focuses on individuals that have established Oklahoma’s art museum culture.

To accomplish this, existing portraits and busts in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame collection will be utilized. As the list shows, objects from outside the collection need to be brought in to better represent the history of Oklahoma’s museums detailed above. In spite of the short list, the museum’s portraits of Nan Sheets and Thomas Gilcrease are especially interesting. Due to their connections with the art world, their portraits were painted by nationally renowned artists.<sup>271</sup> The objects being used from OHOF’s collection are below:

- Nan Sheets portrait.
- Eleanor Kirkpatrick bust and portrait (Decided based on wall space).
- Anna Lee Brosius Korn bust.
- Thomas Gilcrease portrait.

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<sup>271</sup> Larry Pendleton painted Thomas Gilcrease’s portrait. He also painted President Truman’s presidential portrait in 1945. In the case of Nan Sheets portrait, it was painted by Stanislav Rembski. Coincidentally, Eleanor Roosevelt reached out to Rembski to paint a portrait of FDR after his death in 1945.

**Materials from external organizations:**

Out of then ten highlighted contributors to Oklahoma museums featured in this work, the Oklahoma Hall of Fame only has four physical representations in their collection. To help tell a more complete story with the physical exhibit, additional portraits or images are needed. In a couple cases, existing connections with other Oklahoma museums assisted this process. An artistic representation like a painting or a bust was sought after, but there were a couple cases where this type of object (painting/bust) was not available. For example, the Philbrook Museum of Art has a portrait of Waite Phillips in their collection. However, the museum is not loaning out objects through 2021. To fill the place, photographs of the individuals were selected from the *Gateway to Oklahoma History* published online by the Oklahoma Historical Society. The list of outside sources includes:

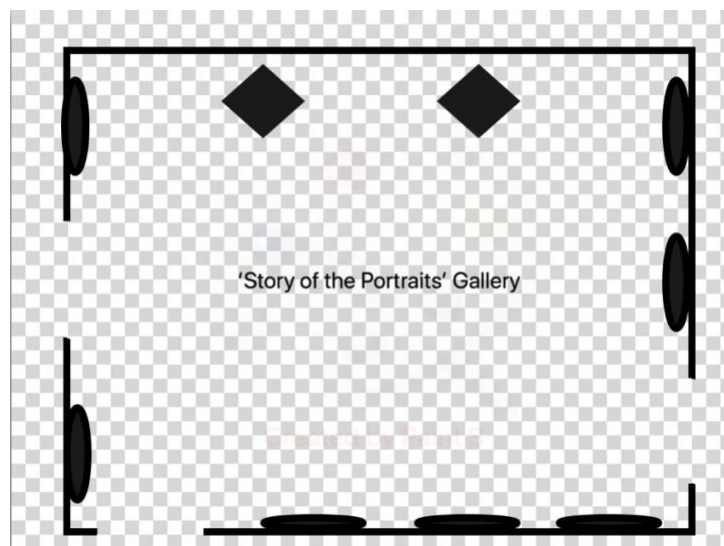
- Photograph of a Laura Clubb portrait from the Oklahoma Historical Society (**1990.056 Czarina Conlan Collection** 5488 Persons - Laura Clubb, a painting by H. R. Bruner, 1929).
- Waite Phillips photograph from the *Gateway to Oklahoma History* (Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, 2012.201.B1054.0182).
  - Other avenues are currently being considered for Waite Phillips. Villa Philmonte in New Mexico has been contacted to see if they have a portrait of Phillips in their collection. Additionally, the Philbrook Museum of Art has been contacted to see if a digital version of the portrait in their collection is available.
- Fr. Gregory Gerrer portrait from the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art.
  - Loan agreement being finalized.

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- John Kirkpatrick photograph from the *Gateway to Oklahoma History* (Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, 2012.201.B0335.0299).
  - The Kirkpatrick's will be represented by Eleanor's bust currently in the OHOF collection. This photo as well as several others will be included on their label.
- Oscar Brousse Jacobson portrait from the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art
  - Loan agreement being finalized.
- Woody Crumbo photograph from the *Gateway to Oklahoma History* (Jim Argo Collection, 23389.183.73).

### **Display Options:**

The exhibit is in the 'Story of the Portraits' Gallery on the third floor of the Gaylord Pickens Museum. The room has the original wooden walls from when the building first opened in 1927. As a result of this, special considerations have to be made to hand portraits around antique light fixtures and wood moulding on the walls. The following display below features nine portraits or busts with John Kirkpatrick being introduced on the label next to the Eleanor Kirkpatrick bust. The circles represent portraits, and the diamonds represent the two busts. Here is the configuration below:





### **Educational Program:**

As described by the “Learning Objectives”, field trip groups frequently visit the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Additionally, through Free Family Fun programming, children make up a large percentage of the total guests that visit the museum. With that in mind, an additional program has been created to make the physical exhibit more approachable for groups of all ages. It requires a tour guide to facilitate the activity in the museum, but a version of the activity will be included in the virtual exhibit for interaction as well.

- The main educational program will rely on material presented in the informational labels.

There are several variations as to how this program can be delivered.

- The first variation is a “Who’s Who?” game where three questions about an individual are asked to a tour group. The last question will be very easy to ensure the participants are able to answer the riddle correctly.
  - Cards will be printed off and laminated in-house to make this activity available while the exhibit is on display
- The second activity is similar to a scavenger hunt. This provides more flexibility due to the fact a staff member does not have to facilitate the activity. You can also incorporate more areas in the museum than just the gallery space on the third floor. This configuration does not fit being used for field trip groups.
  - This activity provides that opportunity for an additional self-paced activity in the museum, and it can easily be adapted for a virtual format.

### **Virtual Exhibit:**

In 2020, a virtual exhibit must be the most important part of any museum exhibit. Yes, museums are struggling to get guests in their doors. However, the safety of staff and guests are also an important consideration. The virtual format allows for guests unable to come into the

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museum to access the information presented by the exhibit. Whether guests are unable to come in due to the pandemic or distance from the museum, a virtual format presents the opportunity to reach a wider audience.

Several guiding principles are established to account for this problem to ensure the most complete story is being told. First, if an artistic representation like a painting or a bust is available for the exhibit, it is included in the physical exhibit. This includes objects in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame's collection or objects available through loan from other institutions. Next, it was important to represent all of the museums these individuals influenced during their lifetimes. In many cases, the ten individuals highlighted by the exhibit are connected through the museums. Those museums include the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art; the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art; the Oklahoma Art Center; the Oklahoma City Museum of Art; the Philbrook Art Center; the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art; the Oklahoma Hall of Fame; and the Oklahoma Historical Society. Not only does the exhibit tell the story of these individuals' influence on Oklahoma museums, but it also focuses on the cultural community established through Oklahoma's art museums during the twentieth century.

Simply put, the virtual format provides the opportunity to give more information on the stories the exhibit is telling. The labels in the museum only allow for a limited amount of words. Although they will also be exhibited virtually, there is also the opportunity for more research presented in the body of this work to be offered to guests in an accessible format. To this end, the virtual exhibit is beneficial to better tell the history of Oklahoma's art museums.

For an institution like the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, the virtual exhibit is especially beneficial. Considering the collections at OHOF, the overwhelming majority of the objects are portraits of Hall of Fame inductees. A virtual format allows for the exhibit's interpretation to

include objects from other museums. This is important as it allows for better interpretation on key individuals like Woody Crumbo, Nan Sheets, Fr. Gregory Gerrer and Oscar Brousse Jacobson. Due to the fact these individuals are artists, displaying their artwork through a virtual format tells a more complete story regarding their careers.

One of the key features that will be included in the virtual exhibit will be a timeline/story map created using Knight Lab offered for free by Northwestern University. This will be a key area for creativity and additional information in the exhibit. Using an interactive feature like a timeline, the online format presents opportunities to include videos, additional photographs, or most any source imaginable to better tell the story. Due to the fact a lot of the material covered pertains to art, hearing from the artists or the art collectors themselves is especially beneficial. In the case of an artist's work, nobody is more qualified to explain a painting's meaning than the one who created it.

The virtual exhibit is scheduled to launch on 19 January 2021, when the exhibit goes up in the museum.

#### **Chapter 4: Proposal for Future Development for Other Institutions**

David Hunt's 1980 *Guide to Oklahoma Museums* is useful to this work, because it helps categorize the types of museums throughout the state. Throughout the course of this work, the establishment of art museums in Oklahoma were highlighted. This largely represents what some might consider "high culture" due to the fact these individuals were largely wealthy individuals. In many cases, they made their money in oil and gas; or they had a wealthy husband supporting their interests; or they had the financial backing of someone in the oil and gas industry. This does not detract from any of these individuals' contributions. Instead, defining what part of culture these individuals influenced provides valuable context to their contributions.

If one of the ten individuals discussed was not a collector, they were an artist. In some cases, individuals were both artists and collectors at the same time. In the cases of the artists like Oscar Jacobson, Woody Crumbo, Nan Sheets, and Gregory Gerrer, their success as artists enabled their success in building Oklahoma's art museums during the twentieth century. Their experiences as artists brought them in close proximity with art worth collecting, but it also provided them with close connections with a number of individuals in the art field. Their individual success performing as a museum director later in life was largely connected to their achievements in the art world over the span of their careers. This does not take away from their accomplishments in Oklahoma museums. Instead, it demonstrates their importance to Oklahoma's art museums. Several quotes by one artist describing another artist frequently claimed that one individual's contributions established a specific art community through their efforts. Hopefully, this work demonstrated these individuals' influence on Oklahoma's art museums.

With that contribution in mind, there are several ways this work can be expanded for future research either by myself or others interested in the history of Oklahoma's museums. The first area of expansion is probably the most obvious. Further research on the ten individuals already featured completes the narrative of Oklahoma's art museums. In the cases of the artists that became museum directors, there is more research on each individual. The questions surrounding Oscar Jacobson's relationship with Woody Crumbo is certainly an excellent place to continue research. In the end, it only seems appropriate that every individual featured in this work receives more research with the goal in mind of attempting to tell the complete story of their contribution to Oklahoma's art museums.<sup>272</sup> The hope is that further research will eventually lead to completing a doctoral dissertation building on the research presented earlier in the text. Fortunately, there are other ways for an Oklahoma-based researcher like myself to continue research on Oklahoma's museums without being forced to focus on the state's art museums.

As mentioned earlier in the text, Oklahoma is home to over 500 museums ranging from the art museums covered in this work to the Oklahoma City Zoo, from numerous history museums to children's museums. There is clear diversity in the types of museums present in Oklahoma. Whereas this work clearly focused on art museums, additional research on the history of Oklahoma's history museums, Oklahoma's science museums, or Oklahoma's zoological societies help complete the narrative of Oklahoma museum history. Whereas my experiences in Oklahoma museums afforded me the experience to tell the history of Oklahoma's art museums, other museum professionals might be better equipped to tell the history of other types of

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<sup>272</sup> Ambitious, not possible.

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museums in the state. Following this notion, my hope is that this work serves as a jumping off point for research into the history of Oklahoma's other types of museums.

Bluntly asked, why are Oklahoma art museums important? The state's museums cover the unique and diverse history of Oklahoma. Whether you subscribe to the view of Oklahoma as an American microcosm or an American exception, Oklahoma's state history went through hundreds of years of progress in a short amount of time. The first "Oklahomans" witnessed the state transform from the forced homeland of Native Americans to a state financially dependent on the oil and gas industry. First of all, it was important to preserve the culture and history that evolved throughout the course of Oklahoma history. If Oklahoma's history was unique, the state's cultural institutions were responsible for preserving and exhibiting important artifacts related to Oklahoma. This study shows the first art museums in Oklahoma accomplished both these goals. These museums preserved Oklahoma's cultural community, and they exhibited art produced by a number of Oklahoma's artists. This was hugely important for Oklahoma's cultural community. Just as this study highlights art museums, there is the possibility for other studies on the history of Oklahoma's other museums.

For instance, the Oklahoma Historical Society's institutional history has been covered by Bob Blackburn. However, there is a network of historical societies and history museums in Oklahoma. Numerous counties have their own county historical society, and this covers an Oklahoma-centric history in many instances. There are also hybrid museums like the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum that have diverse collections containing historic objects but also fine art. Whatever museums are researched moving forward, a continued academic study on Oklahoma's museums is important to provide the most accurate image on the impact and

importance of the state's museums. However, this study is also important to the history of museums in the United States.

This study focuses on Oklahoma history, but other states typically on the east coast like New York benefit from having a longer state history than Oklahoma. In the case of New York, the state was formally founded in 1788. Since then, the state has gone through hundreds of years of change like industrialization and modernization over an appropriate amount of time. During that time, New York's museum culture developed alongside the state's history over the appropriate time. Similar to Oklahoma, New York has a number of diverse museums like art museums, history museums, and even military museums. By taking a similar research approach to New York's museums, there is potential for an interesting historical monograph discussing the history and trends that built another state's museums. Following this approach, every individual state has its own unique history that preserves objects pertaining to United States history. By researching a state's history, historical resources highlight what was important to the state's cultural community through the years.

While this study highlights the history of Oklahoma's art museums in the twentieth century, there are endless areas to continue research on the history of museums. Some of that research focuses on Oklahoma, while there is the option to research another state's art museum history. All in all, the history of museums deserves more attention from historical researchers.

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