TESTIMONY BEFORE NORMAN PARKS COMMISSION ON SEPTEMBER 3, 2026

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I am the author of the definitive scholarly history publication on Norman as a sundown town that won the Oklahoma Historical Society 2018 Marion Wright award with a citation of: Givel, Michael. (2018) Sundown on the Prairie: The Extralegal Campaigns and Efforts from 1889 to 1967 to Exclude African Americans from Norman Oklahoma. *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (96) 3, pp. 260-279.

Currently, the historical marker at Norman's Adkins Crossing Park reads:

> "Named for the Pryor V. Adkins Family who settled on the south side of the Canadian River in the Chickasaw Nation in April 1886. Near this site hundreds of landseekers crossed the river to take up claims on the Unassigned Land at noon April 22, 1889.
>
> Erected by the Cleveland County Historical Society, 1978
>
> Contributed by Jack F. Black in memory of the John O. Black and William O. Jack families who made the "run" on that eventual day."

This marker is significantly incomplete from a historical perspective for two important reasons. The first is the current history provided on the marker about the Land Run. It emphasizes without **any** further nuanced historical background how and why the Land Run happened and in Norman the demographics of all the first settlers, or whose land was unassigned.

Additionally, the City of Norman and the Cleveland County Historical Society (CCHS) have indicated to me that this historical marker contains no known background historical evidence or supporting references to substantiate the current historical decription on the marker. I would also be amiss if I did not state that the CCHS has officially told me they are not currently sponsoring or maintaining the marker. While CCHS helped to erect it in 1978, the CCHS does not own or have authority over the marker today. The City of Norman Parks Department and Norman own and control this marker.

Missing from the description are historically accurate descriptions of what are the Unassigned Lands, Indian Appropriation Act of 1889, the nature of the land claims, and what were the demographics of those that crossed the "river" (actually the South Canadian River). The following from my research provides an overview.

- The designation of Unassigned Lands happened with an Amendment to the Indian Appropriation Act of 1889 in the U.S. Congress, that authorized Pres. Benjamin Harrison to proclaim the 1,887,796 acre region open for settlement.(Agnew, 1989; Edmond History Museum, 2026; Hoig, 2026; Rister,

1942) "Unassigned Lands" first appeared in 1879 when mixed-blood Cherokee journalist Elias C. Boudinot wrote an article for the *Chicago Times* advocating for the area to be opened to white settlement.(Edmond History Museum, 2026) The label of unassigned meant that the lands were not "assigned" to a specific First American Nation that had been relocated to the area.

- Under the federal Homestead Act of 1862, a legal settler including during the 1889 Land Run could claim 160 acres of public land by living on and cultivating the land for five years in order to obtain a legal title.(Hoig, 2026)
- All of the settlers who laid claims in Norman were white according to Norman historian John Womack.(Womack, 1981) In 1890, the population of Norman, which was a sundown town was 787.(Hoig, 2026)

This leads to the second missing part of the current historical marker. Whose lands were unassigned? Here, my sources along with my own research include the First American Museum, OU Bizzell Library, and an OU history professor to confirm what I found. I might add that past statements to the contrary, it also took me about a little over one week to collect the preliminary information I report below.

On February 14, 1833, the *Treaty of Okmulgee* was signed at Fort Gibson with the Muscogee/Creek Nation. (Kappler, 1904a) The Muscogee Creeks ceded their lands in the eastern US. Article 2 of the 1833 treaty defined their land including west and south of the Cherokee lands and bordering the South Canadian River. A treaty between the Creek and the Seminole tribes, ratified August 16, 1856, by the US Senate, ceded to the Seminole Nation a tract of Creek land to the Seminole Nation located between the South Canadian River and the North Fork of the Canadian River.(Kappler, 1904b) Article 3 of this treaty states:

> "Said lands so granted by the United States to the Seminole Nation are bounded and described as follows, to wit: Beginning on the Canadian River where the line dividing the Creek lands according to the terms of their sale to the United States by their treaty of February 6, 1866,b following said line due north to where said line crosses the north fork of the Canadian River; thence up said north fork of the Canadian River a distance sufficient to make two hundred thousand acres by running due south to the Canadian River; thence down said Canadian River to the place of beginning."(Kappler, 1904b)

So, the best available evidence indicates that in the modern-day Norman is on land first granted to the Seminole Nation and then ceded to the Muscogee/Creek Nation and then it was unassigned. There is also evidence of other First Americans who traveled through this area.

In conclusion, the historical facts as currently presented on the Adkins Crossing Marker are incomplete and potentially misleading. They do not reference how and why

the Land Run occurred, who were the first Norman settlers, and whose land was claimed.

I call on the Norman Park Commission to immediately begin to update the current historical marker at Adkins Crossing Park. The new historical marker needs to **add to** the history already there and correct this significant historical problem with a more complete history. And given the lack of documentation and incomplete historical description of the current marker this update should occur now regardless of any possible changes or future name change to Adkins Crossing Park.

Thank you.

REFERENCES

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