CCHS Recommendation Regarding Adkins Crossing Marker

Following a review of the Adkins Crossing historical marker and available supporting documentation, the Cleveland County Historical Society recommends **retaining the existing marker without revision or replacement**. The review identified no factual inaccuracies in the marker's current text.

The concerns raised by Dr. Givel primarily address the limited historical context provided regarding the Unassigned Lands, the Land Run of 1889, the dispossession of Native American peoples, and other aspects of the area's history. While these are important and complex subjects that warrant thoughtful historical interpretation, the purpose and physical limitations of a historical marker necessarily require a narrow focus. Similar historical markers located throughout Norman's parks provide concise accounts of the family associated with the property and explaining its connection to the park's name rather than comprehensive examinations of the broader historical circumstances surrounding them. The Adkins Crossing marker is consistent with this approach. The absence of a more extensive discussion of related historical subjects does not, in itself, render the existing marker inaccurate or misleading.

Should the Cleveland County Historical Society pursue additional interpretation of the Land Run, the Unassigned Lands, or the broader history of the area, staff recommends doing so through a more comprehensive interpretive format that allows for appropriate historical depth and nuance. Any such effort should be developed in consultation with relevant Tribal Nations and informed by appropriate historical sources.

Historical Documentation and Interpretive Standards Supporting the Staff Recommendation

A review of available historical documentation has identified no factual inaccuracies in the existing Adkins Crossing marker. The Adkins family history and subsequent local histories support the account presented on the marker, while contemporary newspaper articles establish that Adkins Crossing was a recognized place name by at least 1906. Research is ongoing to identify additional corroborating evidence from primary sources.

Although the Cleveland County Historical Society does not possess documentation identifying the specific sources consulted when the marker was created in 1978, the absence of these records should not be interpreted as evidence that the marker was created without historical research or that its contents lack historical support. It simply means that the sources consulted by the original authors nearly fifty years ago are unknown. The historical claims presented on the marker can still be evaluated and independently corroborated using sources available today.

Current Oklahoma Historical Society standards require historical markers to present historically accurate information supported by appropriate documentation, however we cannot retroactively apply these standards to a marker created in the past, nor can we assume that there was never any documentation. Additionally, these standards distinguish between the detailed historical research supporting a marker and the concise interpretive text intended for public display. Similarly, National Park Service guidance for outdoor wayside exhibits emphasizes the importance of maintaining a clear interpretive focus. The NPS advises that "the best waysides make one point and one point only" and recommends addressing subjects requiring extensive historical analysis through other interpretive formats. Although the Adkins Crossing marker is not an NPS wayside exhibit, these principles provide a useful framework for evaluating its purpose and scope.

The Adkins Crossing marker is consistent with multiple other historical markers located throughout Norman's parks, which identify the families associated with particular properties and explain their connections to the parks' names. These markers serve a specific interpretive purpose rather than attempting to provide comprehensive histories of the land or the broader historical circumstances surrounding its settlement.

Historical markers are necessarily limited in both physical space and the amount of information that can be effectively communicated to visitors. More importantly, attempting to incorporate the history of the Unassigned Lands, the Land Run of 1889, Native American dispossession, federal Indian policy, settlement, racial exclusion in Norman, and the broader history of the land into a single marker would require reducing exceptionally complex subjects to brief summaries. Such an approach risks creating additional interpretive problems by presenting these histories without the context necessary to understand their causes, consequences, and significance. Responsible historical interpretation requires sufficient space to examine these subjects with appropriate accuracy, nuance, and consideration for the people and communities affected.

Current interpretive best practices recognize that different subjects and educational objectives are best served by different forms of interpretation. Rather than requiring an individual historical marker to address the entirety of the historical context surrounding its subject, more comprehensive interpretation should be developed through formats capable of accommodating the necessary research, historical perspectives, and explanatory detail.

For these reasons, staff maintains that the existing Adkins Crossing marker fulfills its intended interpretive purpose and that the available historical evidence does not establish a need for revision or replacement. Should additional interpretation of the broader history of the area be pursued, it should be developed as a separate, more comprehensive effort in consultation with relevant Tribal Nations and other appropriate historical sources and stakeholders.