

THE PERSISTENCE OF A CULTURAL FAULT LINE IN THE CHEROKEE COUNTRY

John A. Milbauer

In the early 1940s, Leslie Hewes stated that due to a different culture history, the boundary of northeastern Oklahoma's Cherokee Ozarks with adjacent Arkansas and Missouri was a cultural "fault line." From the examination of census data and from fieldwork, he demonstrated that on the Oklahoma side, land use was more primitive, buildings were more derelict, population was smaller and more rural, and trade was not as well developed. Pioneer conditions survived longer in the Cherokee Ozarks, claimed Hewes, due to the presence of poor conservative "full bloods," and more numerous non-progressive whites. Recently, the author updated Hewes' study to learn if his cultural fault line still existed. Every effort was made to replicate the original methodology. The same categories of data were examined in the current censuses, when possible, and field work duplicated that of the initial research. It was learned that Oklahoma lagged behind the area immediately to the east in every criterion. A conservative proclivity prevails in the Cherokee Ozarks, among Cherokees and whites alike. This is a case of "first effective settlement," where the earliest permanent settlers set the pattern and subsequent arrivals conformed.

Political boundaries, both international and internal, sometimes separate different cultural landscapes. Boundaries of various orders might display sharp contrasts in vegetation use, intensity of land utilization, newspaper circulation, house types, expressions of nationalism, and other features (Augelli 1980; Bahre and Bradbury 1978; Prescott 1965; Rose 1955).¹

More than half a century ago, Leslie Hewes argued that the Cherokee Ozarks² of northeastern Oklahoma, bounded on the west and south by the Grand and Arkansas rivers, respectively (Figure 1), were separated from adja-

John A. Milbauer is an associate professor in the Department of Geography and Sociology, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, OK 74464. The author is indebted to the Faculty Research Committee of Northeastern State University for the project's funding. Professor Chuck Ziehr of that campus was very helpful with his cartographic assistance

Oklahoma Ozarks and Bordering Region

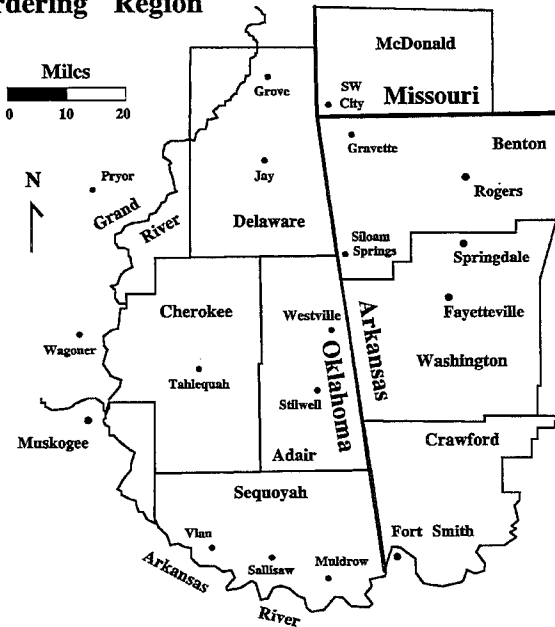


Figure 1. The Oklahoma Ozarks and Bordering Region (Source: Author)

cent Arkansas and Missouri by a “cultural fault line” (Hewes 1943). From the examination of census data and from field work, Hewes maintained that the Cherokee Ozarks lagged behind the area immediately to the east in a number of respects: population was less dense, rural land use was more “primitive” (less intensive), farm building were poorer and not as well kept, towns were fewer and smaller, and trade was not as well developed. In recent years, modernization has effected sweeping changes in the Ozarks, as it has everywhere. Long established patterns are often obliterated by the homogenization of mass culture. In 1995-96 the author updated Hewes’ study to learn if his cultural fault line still existed. Every effort was made to replicate the original methodology as accurately as possible.

Land Use

Hewes employed 1930 data to compare land utilization of the Cherokee Ozarks

(Sequoyah, Adair, Cherokee, and Delaware counties, Oklahoma) with the area to the east (Crawford, Washington, and Benton counties, Arkansas, and McDonald County, Missouri, Figure 2). The amount of land devoted to crops was similar in both sectors, 24 percent in the Cherokee Country and 27.1 percent in the border counties. Fenced pasture, however, accounted for 13.1 percent of the Cherokee Ozarks and 29.5 percent of the bordering region. Approximately 60 percent of the Oklahoma region was unimproved land, in contrast to 40 percent of the adjoining region. While the amount of land in crops was comparable on both sides of the boundary, the Oklahoma segment was more devoted to corn, and it had less land in commercial orchards, vineyards, small fruits, and hay. In 1930, orchards and vineyards comprised only two percent of the cropland in the Cherokee Ozarks, compared with 10.3 percent of the cropland of the bordering counties. These data clearly reveal the greater preservation of pioneer traits in the Cherokee Ozarks, which include dependence on corn and open range.

The extensive nature of land use in the Cherokee Ozarks compared to the border counties was reflected in the value of farm land and buildings. In a graphic representation of the correlation of the average value of land per farm and of farm buildings per farm in 1930, the Cherokee counties ranked below the four border counties as well as those of other parts of the Ozarks.

Husbandry on both sides of the boundary has undergone such a metamorphosis that overall land-use patterns are comparable. The 1992 Census of Agriculture indicated that 10 percent of the Cherokee Ozarks was given to crops, 27.5 percent was in pasture, and 62.5 percent was "other land," mostly woodland. In the border counties, the breakdown was 13.1 percent, 24.9 percent, and 62 percent, respectively (Figure 3).

In Oklahoma, corn—so important in the subsistence economy of the past—is minor at present. Orchards and vineyards (now simply "orchards" in the current Census of Agriculture) have continued a downward trend that was underway even during the time of the original study, and by 1992 they had dwindled to 0.37 percent of the Cherokee area's cropland and 0.42 percent of that of the bordering counties. In both sectors, crops have given way to livestock, and fenced pasture has replaced the open range of the past. Currently, the amount of unimproved land in the Cherokee area is nearly identical to that of the earlier study, while it has increased in the border region.

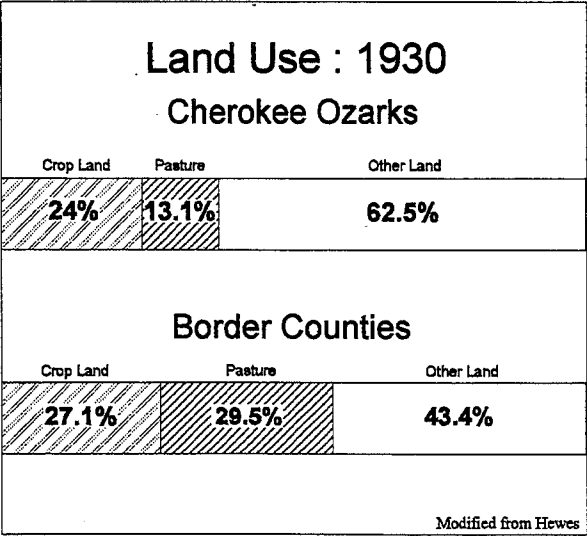


Figure 2. Land Use, 1930 (Source: Modified from Hewes 1943)

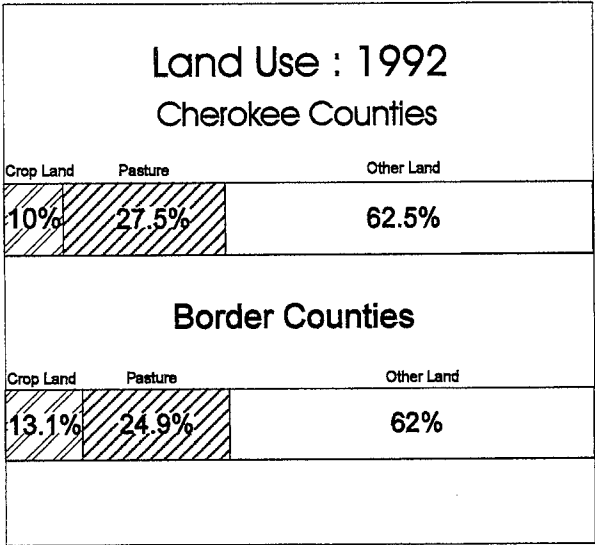


Figure 3. Land Use, 1992 (Source: Census of Agriculture 1992)

While orchards and vineyards have declined in the Ozarks recently, other intensive activities have proliferated, and in conformity with traditional patterns (Hewes 1942). Most significant is poultry. In 1992, all poultry sales in the border counties totaled \$548,334,000, in contrast to a mere \$122,431,000 in the Cherokee sector. That year, the region to east had sixty-three nurseries compared to northeastern Oklahoma's thirty-two. Also, in 1992, the sale of dairy products in the border counties was \$22,426,000, while the figure for the Cherokee Ozarks was \$17,809,000.

Whereas Hewes examined the correlation between the average values of land and buildings per farm as reported in the 1930 Census of Agriculture, the current 1992 census categorizes data somewhat differently. Despite this difference, the pattern remains. The estimated average value of land and buildings per farm in 1992 was \$112,100 in the Cherokee Ozarks, compared to \$183,447 in the border region. Furthermore, the estimated average value of all machinery and equipment per farm was \$21,136 in the former area and \$24,127 in the latter.

Housing

The initial study revealed that farm buildings (dwellings) of the Cherokee Ozarks were of poorer construction, were smaller, and were less pretentious than those immediately to the east (Figure 4). A count of 496 houses on both sides of ninety-four miles of highway and byway in the former area showed that 40 percent were of primitive vertical siding (board and batten) and 14 percent were of frontier vintage log, while 30 percent were covered with a more substantial clapboard frame and 7 percent were of stone, brick, or other materials. A survey of 227 houses in Arkansas, by contrast, revealed that 11 percent were of vertical siding, about 1 percent were log, 84 percent were covered with clapboard, and 4 percent were built of stone, brick, stucco, and other substances. In another examination of 283 houses in the Cherokee Ozarks, only 7 percent exceeded one story, and 73 percent were unpainted. In Arkansas, however, 29 percent of 171 houses were greater than one story, and only 39 percent were unpainted.

The half century that followed the original analysis brought such immense changes in housing that an exact duplication of methodology is impossible. The author observed the identical number of rural houses on both sides of the

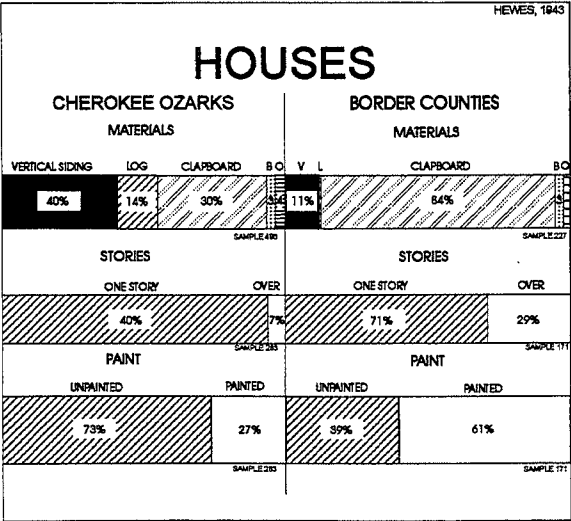


Figure 4. Houses in the Cherokee Ozarks and Border Counties, 1940s
(Source: Modified from Hewes 1943)

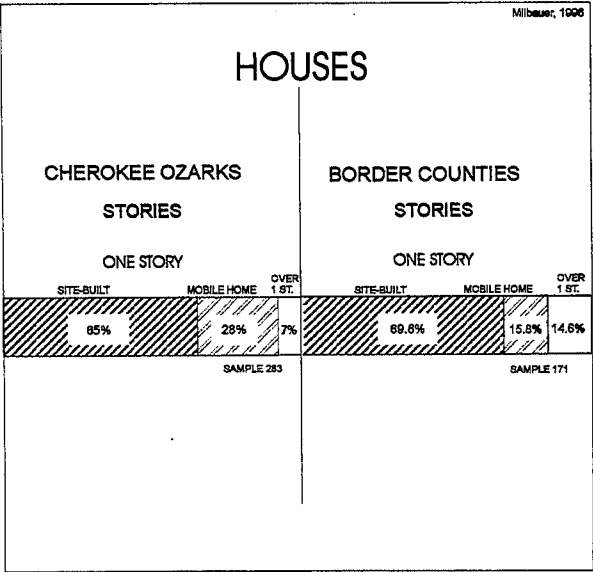


Figure 5. Houses in the Cherokee Ozarks and Border Counties, 1990s
(Source: Author’s field survey 1996)

border for the same characteristics observed by Hewes, and for features that have become common in recent years (Figure 5). Twenty-nine percent of Oklahoma's dwellings possessed clapboard or other horizontal siding, in contrast to 49 percent in Arkansas. Paneling covered 25 percent of Cherokee Country houses and 16 percent of those in Arkansas. In most cases, paneling was on low-cost mobile homes.

Both sides of the boundary revealed comparable proportions of houses clad with brick, stone, shingle, vertical boards, stucco, and mixed materials. It is significant that in Oklahoma, nine houses were of cement block, three were of log, one was covered with tarpaper, and one was built of sheet metal. These inexpensive materials were lacking in Arkansas, save one tarpaper shack. All houses were painted, except for those of brick or stone. Sixty-five percent of Oklahoma's dwellings were one-story, site-built structures, 28 percent were mobile homes, and seven percent were greater than one story. The data for Arkansas were 69.6 percent, 15.8 percent, and 14.6 percent, respectively. The disparity between the two regions is striking—the Cherokee Country has almost twice as many mobile homes and less than half the number of houses in excess of one story. Referred to as "contemporary folk houses" (McAlester 1986), mobile homes are popular in the South and West among families of moderate income (Jakle, Bastian, and Meyer 1989; Hart and Morgan 1995). This inequality is corroborated by the 1990 Census of Housing, in which the mean value of a housing unit was \$46,175 in the Cherokee Ozarks and \$66,300 in the Arkansas sector.

Population

In 1940, the population of the Cherokee Ozarks was 93,425, and it was almost entirely rural (Figure 6). Only Tahlequah exceeded the Census's urban threshold of 2,500, and a mere 18.5 percent of the total population lived in incorporated towns. In contrast, population in the border counties was 116,931, the region possessed five urban places, and 32.6 percent of the inhabitants lived in incorporated settlements.

Population patterns in the Cherokee Country in 1990 were not radically different from those of half a century earlier (Figure 7). The total number of inhabitants was only 113,368, an increase of only 21.3 percent over the 1940 figure. While the number of urban places had risen to five, 66 percent of the

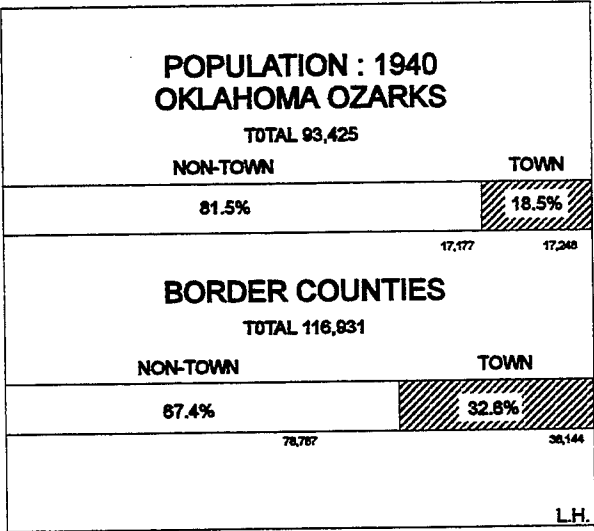


Figure 6. Population, 1940 (Source: Modified from Hewes 1943)

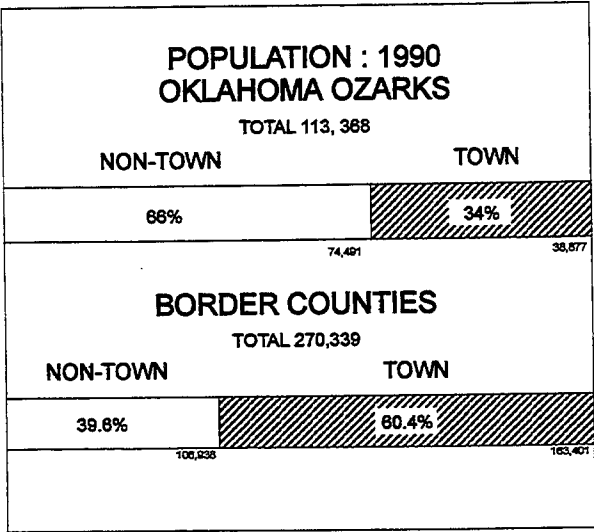


Figure 7. Population, 1990 (Source: Census of Population 1990)

region's residents still lived outside of incorporated towns. The population of the border counties, however, had grown to 270,339, an increase of 231.2 percent since 1940. It contained seven urban places, and 60.4 percent of the population lived in incorporated communities.

Trade

The Cherokee Ozarks had long been dependent on trade centers in the border counties, where federal and Cherokee permits were not required and liquor sales were legal. In the 1920s and 1930s, retail trade was still low, claimed Hewes, due to limited income and continued reliance on outside trade centers. In 1930, the average income per farm and per-capita sales were lower in the Cherokee Ozarks than in the bordering counties (Table 1). The ratio of income per farm to per-capita sales, however, was 5.7 in the latter case and 3.2 in the former, due to the Cherokee Ozarks' reliance on trade centers outside of the region.

Present trade patterns remain similar to those found in the earlier study, and for the same reasons. Farm income and per-capita income (not available for the original paper) in the Cherokee area are below that of the counties immediately to the east (Table 2). The ratio of income per farm to per-capita sales is still higher in the Cherokee Ozarks. Indeed, the residents of Cherokee County know very well that serious shopping must be done elsewhere.

Discussion

Hewes ascribed the disparities on both sides of the fault line to a different culture history. A major factor in the modest development of the Cherokee Ozarks, claimed Hewes, was the survival of pioneer traits. These traits included a dependence on corn and a few garden vegetables, open range, reliance on spring water, and use of log houses. Poor, conservative "full-bloods" were not the only segment of the population that was non-innovative. More numerous were "non-progressive" poor whites. This lot commonly entered the region as laborers, renters of Indian land, and illegal intruders during the period of Cherokee government or immediately after its breakdown. They had no political rights, and their children were denied attendance at Indian schools, which discouraged more enterprising families from living in the territory. Tenancy remained high after statehood, since a large amount of poorly used Indian-owned land could be rented at minimum prices. In 1930, over half of all farmers in the

Cherokee Ozarks were tenants, in contrast to less than one-third in the border counties. Needless to say, this situation was hardly conducive to agricultural improvement.

A generally conservative mind-set still pervades the Oklahoma Ozarks. While the Cherokees have been praised for their progress since the eighteenth century, the nation was in reality dichotomized. Certain individuals, largely mixed-bloods, were receptive to European-American culture; others preferred a more traditional lifestyle. This condition persists at the present time (Wahrhaftig and Lukens-Wahrhaftig 1979; Woodward 1963). Elements of the aboriginal religion survive (largely among the Keetoowah Society), as do the Cherokee language, shamanism, and traditional foods. The folk church building of the Upland South is commonly found among both Native American and white congregations (Milbauer 1988). Also utilized by both groups are Mid-

Table 1. Average Income Per Farm, 1930s, Not Including Value of Products Consumed on the Farm, Compared with Average Per-Capita Retail Sales

Counties of the Cherokee Ozarks					
	Delaware	Sequoyah	Adair	Cherokee	Average
Income per Farm	\$717	\$556	\$543	\$447	\$568
Per-Capita Sales	\$59	\$88	\$142	\$115	\$100
Ratio of Income Per Farm to Per-Capita Sales	12.2	6.3	3.8	3.9	5.7
Bordering Ozarks Counties					
	Washington	McDonald	Benton	Crawford	Average
Income per Farm	\$772	\$717	\$697	\$660	\$725
Per-Capita Sales	\$264	\$196	\$235	\$169	\$227
Ratio of Income Per Farm to Per-Capita Sales	2.9	3.7	3.0	3.9	3.2

Source: Adapted from Hewes 1943. Computed from *Census of Agriculture* 1930 and *Census of Retail Trade* 1930.

land log structures, a tradition that has endured much longer in northeastern Oklahoma than in most of the country (Milbauer 1996-97). Although this archaic inclination delights the student of folkways, it does not favor capital- and labor-intensive activities.

The continued stagnation in the Oklahoma Ozarks relative to the region immediately to the east evokes the "doctrine of first effective settlement." This thesis states that the first permanent group of settlers in an empty territory, even if small in number, are of crucial significance to the later social and cultural geography of the region. The few tens of thousands of migrants who arrived on the Atlantic Seaboard before 1700, for example, were more

Table 2. Average Income Per Farm, 1990s, Compared with Average Per-Capita Retail Sales and Per-Capita Income

Counties of the Cherokee Ozarks					
	Delaware	Sequoyah	Adair	Cherokee	Average
Income per Farm	\$12,714	\$6,192	\$15,025	\$27,930	\$15,465
Per-Capita Sales	\$3,770	\$4,458	\$2,847	\$4,519	\$3,899
Ratio of Income Per Farm to Per-Capita Sales	3.4	1.4	5.3	6.2	4.0
Per-Capita Income	\$9,572	\$9,974	\$7,378	\$9,446	\$8,868
Bordering Ozarks Counties					
	Washington	McDonald	Benton	Crawford	Average
Income per Farm	\$24,709	\$11,878	\$25,795	\$16,223	\$19,651
Per-Capita Sales	\$9,815	\$3,838	\$7,156	\$4,365	\$6,294
Ratio of Income Per Farm to Per-Capita Sales	2.5	3.1	3.6	3.7	3.2
Per-Capita Income	\$11,625	\$8,409	\$12,274	\$9,689	\$10,499

Sources: *Census of Agriculture, Geographic Area Series* 1992; *Census of Retail Trade, Geographic Area Series*, 1992; *Census of Population, Social and Economic Characteristics* 1990.

consequential to American cultural heredity than the tens of millions who arrived later (Zelinsky 1992). The small number of Finns and Swedes who settled in the short-lived colony of New Sweden in the Delaware Valley provided the model of pioneer architecture and carpentry for the Midland frontier (Jordan 1985). Furthermore, the first postpioneer settlement in the wooded eastern United States established long-lasting patterns of folk housing (Kniffen 1965). While the Cherokees were relocated on land ceded from the Osage Nation, the latter used the area only as a hunting ground, and they had no permanent settlements east of the Grand River, the border of the study region (Foreman 1936; McReynolds 1964; Mathews 1961). Here, the Cherokees found a virtually empty land in the 1820s and 1830s, and they established a cultural landscape that reflected their fondness for pioneer ways and traditional forms of land use. Whites of a similar bent were not far behind, and they reinforced the condition. Subsequent arrivals have tended to follow suit.

Conclusion

Conditions observed by Hewes in the Cherokee Ozarks relative to the area immediately to the east remain visible today. In the former sector, less attention is given to such intensive activities as poultry, nurseries, and dairying. The value of farm land and buildings per farm is below that of other border counties and other counties in the Ozarks. Housing in the Cherokee Ozarks is more primitive than that of nearby Arkansas. Compared to the border region, the population of the Oklahoma Ozarks is much lower, it remains mostly rural, and towns are fewer and smaller. Farm income and per-capita income are lower in the Cherokee Ozarks, and retail trade is lower in volume. A cultural fault line clearly survives in the Cherokee Country.

The Oklahoma Ozarks are a clear example in which a political boundary separates distinctive cultural landscapes. This region is but one small part of former Indian Territory. It would be interesting to learn if similar conditions exist elsewhere along Oklahoma's boundaries. Furthermore, many of the political boundaries of different levels throughout the world must certainly be cultural boundaries as well. The topic invites study.

Notes

¹ Political boundaries do not always divide distinctive cultural landscapes. Arreola and Curtis (1993), for example, contend that the United States-Mexico Borderlands are a loosely defined zone that straddles the borderline.

² The term "Cherokee Ozarks" is misleading, since the white population exceeded that of Native Americans as far back as statehood in 1907 (Hewes 1940).

References

- Arreola, D. D., and Curtis, J. R. 1993. *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality*. Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press.
- Augelli, J. P. 1980. The Nationalization of Dominican Borderlands. *Geographical Review* 70:19-35.
- Bahre, C. J. and Bradbury, D. E. 1978. Vegetation Change Along the Arizona-Sonora Boundary. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 68:145-165.
- Foreman, G. 1936. *Indians and Pioneers: The Story of the American Southwest Before 1830*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hart, J. F., and Morgan, J. T. 1995. Mobile Homes. *Journal of Cultural Geography* 15:35-53.
- Hewes, L. 1940. Geography of the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma. Ph.d. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Hewes, L. 1942. The Oklahoma Ozarks as the Land of the Cherokees. *The Geographical Review* 32: 269-281.
- Hewes, L. 1943. Cultural Fault Line in the Cherokee Country. *Economic Geography* 19:136-142.
- Jakle, J. A., Bastian, R. W., and Meyer, D. K. 1989. *Common Houses in America's Small Towns*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Jordan, T. G. 1985. *American Log Buildings*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Kniffen, F. 1965. Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55:549-577.
- McAlester, V., and McAlester, L.. 1986. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- McReynolds, E. C. 1964. *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Mathews, J. J. 1961. *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Milbauer, J. A. 1988. Rural Churches in Northeastern Oklahoma. *North American Culture* 4:41-52.
- Milbauer, J. A. 1996-97. Pennsylvania Extended in the Cherokee Country: A Study of Log Architecture. *Pennsylvania Folklife* 46:92-101.

- Prescott, J. R. V. 1965. *The Geography of Frontiers and Boundaries*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Rose, A.J. 1955. The Border Zone Between Queensland and New South Wales. *Australian Geographer* 6:3-18.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1990. *Census of Housing: General Housing Characteristics*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1990. *Census of Population: General Population Characteristics*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1990. *Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics*. Washington, D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1992. *Census of Agriculture, Geographic Area Series*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1992. *Census of Retail Trade: Geographic Area Series*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Wahrhaftig, A. L. and Lukens-Wahrhaftig, J. 1979. New Militants or Resurrected State? The Five County Northeastern Oklahoma Cherokee Organization. In *The Cherokee Nation: A A Troubled History*, ed. Duane H. King, pp. 223-246.
- Woodward, G. S. 1963. *The Cherokees*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Zelinsky, W. 1992. *The Cultural Geography of the United States: A Revised Edition*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.