The Thirst of the West

Understanding Water History and Policy in Oklahoma

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Oklahoma by Geography
Oklahoma by Elevation
Oklahoma by Rivers
Oklahoma by Region: The Great Plains
Oklahoma by Region: The Southwest
Oklahoma by Region:
The American West
The Aridity Line
Great Plains Climatic Cycles

- 1840s-50s --- good years, big boom!
- 1860 --- drought
- 1866 --- grasshopper infestation
- 1866-75 --- boom years!
- 1873 --- national economic panic
- 1874 --- drought
- 1875-77 --- grasshopper infestations
- 1885-88 --- big blizzards
- 1888-92 --- boom years!
- 1893 --- economic depression (outmigration)
- 1900-29 --- boom years!
- 1930’s --- depression, drought, dust storms
- 1950s --- drought
- 1977 --- drought
- 2002 --- drought
- 2011 --- drought
Climate Change Attempts on the Southern Plains, 1870s-1890s

- “Rain will follow the plow”
  - “scientific” research
  - Biblical blessings
Climate Change Attempts on the Southern Plains, 1870s-1890s

- “Rain will follow the plow”
- Fireworks and cannon blasting
  - “Cloud Crackers”
  - Based on perceived changes during Civil War
  - Gunpowder and chemical additives to atmosphere
Climate Change Attempts on the Southern Plains, 1870s-1890s

- “Rain will follow the plow”
- Fireworks and cannon blasting
- Prayer sessions
  - Prayer circles out in fields
  - Special sessions at churches
Climate Change Attempts on the Southern Plains, 1870s-1890s

- "Rain will follow the plow"
- Fireworks and cannon blasting
- Prayer sessions
- Forestation programs
  - Shelter belts
  - Exotic species "forests" (i.e. using catawba trees)
  - Nebraska National Forest
  - attempt at a Kansas National Forest (!)
Climate Change Attempts on the Southern Plains, 1870s-1890s

- “Rain will follow the plow”
- Fireworks and cannon blasting
- Prayer sessions
- Forestation programs
- Artificial rain-making companies
  - Used hot-air balloons
  - Used explosives to blast chemicals into atmosphere
  - Idea of shooting magnetized sand into clouds
  - Blamed wind on failure
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- Railroads promoted all of these endeavors.
- Local boosters promoted the initiatives.
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BUT...nothing worked, and many did as the Comanches and Kiowa had always done: picked up and moved!
Altus Dam and Reservoir, North of Altus, Oklahoma
The McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System
The Ogallala Aquifer