Welcome to Historic Downtown Ada. As you follow this guide you will learn about life in Ada around the turn of the century. The Reed and Dagg families moved to this area in 1890; the Ada post office was established in 1892. In 1893, the present city of Ada was named for the oldest daughter of Jeff Reed. Mr. Reed was considered the founder of the town, since he petitioned the Federal Post Office Department to establish a post office in his store. He submitted three names. The Post Office Department selected the name Ada from his three suggestions. (Biles, 1954.)

By that time there were several general stores, a blacksmith, a cotton gin and even a photographer. The business district was moved across the creek in 1900 to be the near the newly built railroad. The City of Ada was incorporated in 1901. The location of this original town site and the sites of these early stores are shown in the following map which is accessible by automobile.

THE WALKING TOUR

1. You are in front of the Frisco Passenger Depot. Three railroads, the Frisco, the Santa Fe, and the Oklahoma City, Ada & Atoka once provided service to Ada. The Santa Fe depot was on the corner of Main & Johnston Streets and the Katy was on East Main Street. On New Year’s Eve each railroad had an engine parked at its station; at midnight all the engines blew their whistles and rang their bells to welcome the New Year.

2. The Federal Courthouse/Opera House was built in 1903. The courtroom and Grayson Drugs were on street level; an opera house and a general meeting room occupied the second floor. Later the Ada Hotel was on the second floor.

This whole block was known as “Bloody Street” or “The Bucket of Blood” because of the knife and gun fights that took place here. Ada was still Indian Territory and the judiciary for allowing criminals to get away with little or no punishment. Finally, four men who allegedly murdered a prominent rancher were lynched by a group of Ada businessmen in 1909. The lynching received nationwide news coverage and helped bring law and order to the area. A granite marker describing the event is found ½ block north of this intersection.

3. The McSwain Theater was built in 1920. Tickets cost 15 cents for adults and a dime for children. The Spanish mission style building held 1350 people. Foster McSwain is said to have introduced to Ada the idea of drawing for cash door prizes. The first “talkie” shown in Ada was at the McSwain. At one time there were four other theaters here; the Kiva, Strand, Ritz, and Ada. Gene Autry made a personal appearance in Ada to promote his movie.

4. The Post Office was moved from “Old Town” in 1902. The story goes that the building was moved in the middle of the night with the postmaster locked inside because he had opposed the relocation. The Post Office moved again to west 12th in 1910 and to its present site in 1933.

The first city well was dug by John Beard at the back of this lot. A city ordinance passed in 1902 required each business to have a barrel of water in front of the building for fighting fires. This ordinance saved much of the business district a year later when several wooden buildings burned.

5. Ada National Bank opened in 1900. Cotton was the main cash crop at the time and the second story of the building housed the offices of the cotton brokers. Wagons of baled cotton lined up for blocks in all directions during the fall harvest. Brokers literally jumped from wagon to wagon, bargaining with the farmers about a fair price for their crop. The Leader Shoe Store occupied this corner after the bank closed; the outside wall was covered with a sign listing area citizens who were serving in the armed forces.

6. An important part of the cotton industry was the Round Baile Cotton Gin, located on this corner. 20,000 bales of cotton were processed in 1903. At one point, Ada had several cotton gins, a cotton compress, and a cotton seed oil company. The boil weevils and soil depletion put an end to the “cotton era” in the early 1920’s.

7. The Ada News is the only newspaper that has been in continuous operation in Ada since the early 1900’s, and has occupied this site since 1904. The round “window” above the second floor windows was used...
by reporters to announce election results to crowds waiting in the street.

8. Merchants and Planters Bank was established in 1902. Pharmacist Joe Bryan later opened his Corner Drug in the same building. A corner drugstore was often a "hangout" for young people in the early 1900's. Many drugstores had carhops during the 1930's but the practice ended when our young men were called to serve in World War II.

9. The 25,000 Club, an organization made up of visionary businessmen, met in lavishly furnished quarters on the second story of this building. The group's purpose was economic development; their goal was to become a city with a population of 25,000.

10. The Evans building was built in 1903 and was the location of Greer-Coax Clothiers and Evans Hardware until the 1980's. Notice the date at the top of the building.

11. Shaw's Department and Nickel Store, built in 1914, has lovely molded signatures on the front. The building was remodeled a few years ago and it became evident that this building was constructed later than the one next door; painted ads were found on the wall which would have been the exterior wall of the adjoining building.

12. The Pottocott Building has been the location of several businesses, including M. Levin Furniture, Gluckman's Department Store, and Thompson's Book & Supply. It was built in 1918 by P.A. Norris and features "continuous concrete poured walls", an experimental technique developed by Portland Cement.

13. Thompson College Store, a book store & soda fountain owned by Charles & James Thompson, opened for business at 930 E. Main in 1930. Today, the Thompson College Store, still owned by some of the Thompson family, is back at the original location.

14. Coca-Cola Bottling Works was established at this corner in 1910. The franchise was purchased by T.B. Blake in 1912 and the plant was moved to 300 N. Rennie in 1928. The Blake's grandchildren continue to be involved in the business now located on Cradduck Road.

15. The Pioneer Telephone Company office was on the second story of the W.C. Duncan Building, erected in 1917. The first floor is believed to have been a dance hall/game room at one time. The owners of the Curiosity Shop have carefully restored and furnished the building with antique display cabinets to resemble its early motif. The building has had just 4 owners in its history.

16. Juliana Park is the site of the Harris Hotel, built in 1903. The original building only had two stories; it is not certain when the upper story was added. The Harris was known far and wide for its excellent service and cuisine. It was purchased during the 1930's and renamed "The Juliana" in honor of the new owner, Julia Mae Smith. Mrs. Smith and her husband had struck oil near Fittstown and did much to develop the Ada business community.

17. She built the Montgomery Ward Store in the 1930's. It was converted into a City Library in 1984. Headquarters of the Pottocott County Literacy Coalition and meeting rooms are found on the second floor today.

18. Barringer Grocery was also built by Julia Mae Smith for her brothers, John and Fred Barringer. Many Adans remember this as the first location of "Dutch's Market."

19. The Ada Public Library building was designed by Albert Ross and built in 1936. Mr. Ross' name is tied to numerous homes, businesses and churches throughout Ada. The building was renovated and furnished with period furniture in 1984 and serves today as the Ada Arts and Heritage Center, home of many cultural activities, art exhibits, and receptions.

20. The building was being used by a variety of businesses until the 1980's. Notice the stained glass windows on the east side of the building. The movie "Tulsa" starring Susan Hayward and Robert Mitchum was filmed in the hotel lobby and guests can see the set used in the film today.

21. The American Building, the Courthouse, and the six-story Aldridge Building gave Ada a new skyline as it celebrated a quarter century on growth.

22. The block between Townsend and Broadway on 12th Street became the business hub during the first decade of the 1900's ... the post office, Home Title Abstract, Biddy Printing Company, and R.B. Evans Candy Co were just a few of the flourishing enterprises. A hotel known as The Colonnade stood in the middle of the block and people expected 12th Street to be the main street of Ada, and in 1909 12th was the first street to be paved. The squares of the original pavements are still visible along the sides of the street. The pavement was squared off to provide better traction for the horses, mules, and the new automobiles.

23. The Central Fire Station was built in 1908. The original building served as City Hall and had office space for the library, and an auditorium on the second floor with the Fire Department on the street level. New purchases in 1910 included a $40 chemical engine mounted on a wagon and a $500 team of horses. In 1909 there were two paid firemen. The day firemen drew $50 a month; the night fireman was only paid $25 and was expected to find extra work for himself. The building was enlarged in 1939.

24. The Aldridge Hotel was constructed around 1927 at a cost of $300,000. Oilmen and celebrities used to gather at this hotel and it could be assumed many large business deals were struck in the coffee shop. The movie "Tulsa" starring Susan Hayward and Robert Mitchum was filmed in the hotel lobby and guests can see the set used in the film today.

25. J.U. Criswell built this funeral home in 1925. This building also was the first office of the Ada American Oil & Refined Company and planned to be a 2-car garage on the second story. Mr. Skirvin sold this building to the Fleet family in 1929 and moved to Oklahoma City.

26. The American Building, also known as the Fleet Building, was built by W.B. Skirvin in 1925. Skirvin was with American Oil & Refined Company and planned to be a 2-car garage on the second story. Mr. Skirvin sold this building to the Fleet family in 1929 and moved to Oklahoma City.

27. The Masonic Building was probably the site for the planning of the lynching of Gus Bobbitt's alleged killers. The Masons were politically active during this time and it is believed that many of them had a part in the event. All the participants made a pact to keep secret the names of anyone involved... that pact was kept and no one knows for certain how today the identity of any of the people involved.

28. The First National Bank has been in the same location since it was erected in 1902. The original building had a turret on the corner. The bank actually opened for business in the Alfred Nettles Hardware store down the street while this building was being completed.

29. The First National Bank 1911

30. The Harris Clothiers occupied the corner section of the old Central National Bank building. Mr. Rollow had a mercantile that took up much of the rest of this block for many years. This is one of the few buildings where the original bricks can be seen ... look on the back of the building.

31. Simpson's Surprise Store, was owned by R.W. Simpson until it was bought by Sidney and Ben Katz in 1926. The Katz family has operated a department store at this location until the 1980's. Dr. W.D. Faust has an 8-bed hospital on the second story of the Surprise Store building.