Angie Debo

The words on her gravestone sum up her life:
"Historian, discover the truth and publish it."

Chapter 01 – 1:35
Introduction

Announcer: Oklahoma's "greatest historian" was nine years old when she first set foot on Oklahoma soil on November 8, 1899, having arrived by covered wagon with her family from Kansas. About that day, Angie Debo said it was a beautiful golden autumn morning. "The sky was clear blue, and green wheat stretched to the horizon."

Her home town was Marshall, Oklahoma, which did not have a four-year high school before 1910. She was twenty-three when she graduated in 1913. Five years later, she earned a bachelor's in history from the University of Oklahoma and in 1924 a Masters from the University of Chicago. She received a PhD. in history from Oklahoma in 1933.

But even with a PhD, Angie Debo would never hold a position in a history department of a university, largely due to gender discrimination.

Debo turned to writing American Indian History, and among her many discoveries, she learned that much of eastern Oklahoma was dominated by a criminal conspiracy to cheat Indians out of their property.

Her findings were published under the title: *And Still the Waters Run*. She wrote, edited, or coauthored thirteen books in her lifetime.

Angie Debo was 98 when she died February 21, 1988.

Now listen to the story of Angie Debo as told by Dr. Patricia Loughlin, Professor of History and Chair in the Department of History at the University of Central Oklahoma. You will also hear the voice of Angie Debo herself in this oral history presentation on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

Chapter 02 – 6:00
Intro to Angie

John Erling: My name is John Erling, and today's date is March 24, 2017. We're recording this story in the facilities of Voices of Oklahoma on the campus of the University of Tulsa.

Joining me today is Dr. Patricia Loughlin. She is a professor of history and is the History Department chair at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Oklahoma. Patty, you wrote a book titled *Hidden Treasures of the American West*. When did you publish this?

Patricia Loughlin: This book was published in 2005 by the University of New Mexico Press.

JE: You've highlighted three treasures, and these treasures are people. Let's name Muriel Wright.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: What is special about her?

PL: Muriel Wright was a Choctaw historian and a longtime editor of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, the state's historical quarterly at the Oklahoma Historical Society.

JE: And the other treasure is Alice Marriott.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative). First woman to graduate from OU's undergraduate degree in Anthropology, and went on to do incredible research among Kiowa people. For example, a longtime field worker for the Indians Arts and Crafts Board.

JE: And then the person we're here to talk about is Angie Debo, who is definitely a treasure. We're going to be telling her story. She was an American historian. She wrote thirteen books.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative), thirteen books.

JE: And hundreds of articles about Native Americans in Oklahoma history.

PL: Yes.

JE: There were many historians who wrote about Native Americans but she came at it from a unique way that we will get into.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: And her legacy lasts forever, so that's what we want to talk about. Angie was born January 30, 1890, and she died February 21, 1988. She was ninety-eight years old when she died. What was her full name?

PL: Angie Albertha Debo.

JE: Where was she born?

PL: She was born outside of Beattie, Kansas, at home. The family came to Oklahoma when she was a child, as part of this migration story that many families experienced coming West and searching for better opportunities for their children.

JE: Her parents, their names?

PL: Edward and Lena Debo.

JE: Do we know anything about them and their personalities?

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives). And we're still learning more about her parents. But what I can tell you is that both parents instilled an incredible work ethic in their children. Angie had a brother who was about two years younger; his name was Edwin. So the two children grew up with parents who instilled values and work ethic. Father was a farmer, mother worked in the fields and worked in Kansas. And then when they came to Oklahoma, her work continued but it was more in the home while the father was working in the fields.

Her father had an incredible desire for reading. He would read a book once and then move on but he would remember that, he would memorize it. And then her mother really encouraged Angie to do well in school. She kept all of Angie's report cards. We have a record where her mother signed all of her report cards and Angie kept all of those report cards. And her mother also encouraged her to keep a diary for three months at a time, when Angie was nine years old and eleven years old. Those kinds of foundational tools are so important when we think about Angie Debo.

JE: So at home, she had a good base?

PL: Absolutely.

JE: Pushing her to education and pushing her in that area. You said they came in covered wagon.

PL: Yes, I would say she was about eight, soon to be nine years old. She documented her experience coming from Kansas to Oklahoma Territory and starting a new life here.

JE: She documented it, where do we have that?

PL: We have it in her oral history from the 1980s, we have it in letters that she would write to friends back in Kansas, and we have it in her diary.

JE: Did she ever marry?

PL: She did not.

JE: Which is one of the reasons you're telling the story because there aren't any family members, apparently, who were close enough to her to tell the story.

PL: Oh, that's a great question because I think about all the citizens of Marshall, Oklahoma, where she spent quite a bit of time. And that's where she did the majority of her writing, in her family home in Marshall. So I would say a lot of the residents of Marshall are very much her family members. And they would call her Miss Angie. And they knew that they should not bother her half the day because that half the day she was writing. So if you wanted to call on Miss Angie you needed to do it during the appropriate calling hours and do not trouble her until the appropriate hours. But they were very much her family.

JE: But no heirs, and obviously, no children. Do you know if she ever had a romantic life? Did she have anybody that was a possibility?

PL: That's a wonderful question. We think about women historians and the work that we do when we study their work, and I would say some women of means would have more

opportunities to marry, have children, and continue their work. But many women made the intentional choice not to marry, not to have children, to dedicate their lives to their work, to their writings, to the research.

JE: So that's what she did?

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative), absolutely.

JE: How much of the pioneer's spirit affect her writing?

PL: I think about that quite often. The pioneering spirit, her biographer is Shirley Lucky. In many ways, I'm borrowing from Shirley Lucky when I say, "Yes, this pioneering spirit is alive and well in Angie Debo's life and her writings." She studied under E. E. Dale at the University of Oklahoma, who in turn, had studied under Frederick Jackson Turner. Many of us consider him the father of western history.

So if we think about the legacy, it begins with Turner, continues in Dale, and in a modified form continues this pioneering spirit with Angie Debo's writings.

JE: But isn't she credited for being the forerunner of the *new* western history?

PL: Yes, the new Indian history, ethno history, and the new western history.

Chapter 03 – 5:22
Education

John Erling: Let's go back to her education, elementary, junior high, high school. Tell us about that in Marshall.

Patricia Loughlin: When we think about Kansas and then moving to Oklahoma Territory we're going to see some interesting things going on when we look at Marshall, Oklahoma. So she attended one-room schoolhouses in Kansas and in Oklahoma Territory in Marshall. She loved going to school, she enjoyed her teachers, she enjoyed her classmates, they were called scholars. She would ride her pony, Queen, to school with her brother, Edwin. So she loved to learn. She absolutely loved to learn.

She graduated early and by sixteen she was teaching in the rural schools. Then we kind of come to a darker period of her life where she talks about waiting, waiting for the high school to open. Waiting for the high school to open. And then, finally, enrolling in the high school and graduating high school at the age of twenty-three.

JE: Marshall did not have a high school when she was ready to go.

PL: Right. And to her—

JE: And that's why she was waiting for it to open.

PL: And to her, she found that as a detriment.

JE: So that was a dark time for her?

PL: Absolutely.

JE: And you kind of wonder, did she do any writing?

PL: She was working, she was teaching, but she felt like she had more to do. So she was waiting, she was waiting.

JE: Might have been reading every book she could get her hands on, more than likely.

PL: Yes.

JE: But didn't she receive a school diploma when she was twelve?

PL: Yes. She went through the school system, she graduated, she worked in one-room schools as a teacher, and then waiting to get the high school diploma and then continue her training, continue her work at the college level.

JE: And by the way, where is Marshall?

PL: Marshall is to the west of Stillwater, so if you go north on I-35 and then you head west at the Stillwater exit you hit Marshall.

JE: So it's how close?

PL: To Stillwater?

JE: Yeah.

PL: I would say forty minutes.

JE: Okay. So she goes on to college, attends the University of Oklahoma.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Did she graduate from there?

PL: Yes. She studies with E. E. Dale at the University of Oklahoma, really becomes dedicated to the historical profession through her mentor, Dale. He taught her the mechanics of good historical writing in his historical methods course, and she just really took to it. And she didn't stop. Once she got started she just was a prolific writer.

JE: So her interest in Native Americans hadn't happened yet until maybe she met Dr. Dale?

PL: If I may, I would say from her undergraduate experience she continued to study at the University of Chicago. And she was interested in foreign policy, she was interested in a variety of topics. It was when she returned to the University of Oklahoma graduate program to study and receive the PhD in History that she really then focused on American Indian history.

JE: Because Dr. Dale had added American Indian History to the course.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives), yes.

JE: Since she was gone and when she came back it was there.

PL: Yes. He offered the very first American Indian History course at the University of Oklahoma.

JE: So that's then maybe—

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: ...where this is all born.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative). I would say both of them are very interested in studying the American West, the Frontier West. But then listening to his lectures how he would also incorporate American Indian History. And then it's time for her to think about a dissertation topic and it's Dale who suggests that she take a look at the Choctaw Nation records.

JE: Were there similarities between Angie and Dr. Dale in the way they viewed Oklahoma history?

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: So there was kind of a bond there at the beginning?

PL: Yes, yes, absolutely. Both of them had that similar frontier experience. Dale too, was waiting for some of these high school institutions to open. And he also graduated later in life and then he graduated. He also taught in one-room schools and then was a superintendent and reached his undergraduate degree later in life as well. So yes, they come from similar backgrounds.

JE: Was that the beginning as she saw the white settlement on Indian lands as not settlement but as a burden that these allotments were taken away. Which we'll get in and talk more about.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: But at the outset, she had that vision, didn't she?

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: They were taking away land and she was there to right the story.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative). Yes, because whereas Dale might talk about some of these topics in class in his lectures, he would not write about these topics, he would not publish these topics.

But she wanted to learn more. She conducted the archival research and wrote books about these topics.

JE: Right.

PL: Wanted to share the expertise with the public.

JE: I think you talked about graduate school, but wasn't she a principal in Enid for a year?

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative). And when I think about the other women we talk about in *Hidden Treasures of the American West* they too were educators. They too were principals or superintendents, administrators in the public school systems.

JE: And so she taught four years at Enid High School?

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: I hope they're honoring her every day.

PL: I hope they are too.

Chapter 04 - 4:45
Gender Discrimination

John Erling: When she was at the University of Chicago, is this the first time then she experienced gender discrimination? Because this is very much a part of her story.

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: Is that true? And how does that come into her story?

PL: Yeah, I would agree with you, John. These are great questions to consider and discuss. She did very well in her graduate work at the University of Chicago. There were other women who were also students in the graduate program, but it was, I would say, majority male faculty and male graduate students. And when it's time for finding employment, finding tenure-track positions, she really struggled and was actually told that it was detrimental that she was woman; that they were really looking for men to hire.

JE: I think she wrote later on when she was applying maybe to the University of Oklahoma—I'm getting ahead of myself—she said, "This affliction—"

PL: Yes.

JE: "...being a female."

PL: Yes.

JE: You know, right here might be a good place—describe her personality.

PL: What I really enjoy about studying Angie Debo is you see her humor. You see her humor in her writing. You see her humor in the way she would talk and tell stories in her Oral History interviews. And that humor was a live and well in her childhood writings as well, in her diaries she was funny, in her letters to friends in Kansas she was funny. So she had a wonderful sense of humor and she enjoyed life very much.

JE: But she was also very assertive.

PL: Yes.

JE: Which got her through and did the things that she did. Isn't that true? And she had a personality, maybe, that could rub some people the wrong way?

PL: Absolutely. And this is where we need to talk about historians like Angie Debo and others through the lens of gender. Because women may have the same goals, pursuits, similar topics as men, and we can talk about the 1920s and '30s and '40s but some of these issues continue today. So yes, she was confident, she was headstrong, she was unapologetic in her passion and commitment to seeking the truth and publishing it. And sometimes that prevented her from securing employment.

JE: I think I read where about nearly thirty college history departments would not hire females.

PL: Right.

JE: What's the thinking?

PL: I think the thinking is these positions, these privileged positions are reserved for men. Some departments would realize the great contributions and why you should actively hire women historians, women intellectuals. I even think about West Texas where she worked in the demonstration school. Others, men and women though, were promoted over Angie Debo. And then finally, she was working in the museum.

So some could say it was her personality. She was unrelenting and unapologetic. It is a very challenging issue.

JE: Well, some of that remains today. I think you alluded to that earlier.

PL: Yes. If I could add here, what I'm thinking about is in the 1950s she had the opportunity to teach Oklahoma History at Oklahoma State University. She was the Maps librarian. She was working in the library. When I talk to different historians around the state, they had her Oklahoma History class. That's how they became inspired to become historians, was taking her class at Oklahoma State University as an undergraduate, for example. Then they went on to become historians in their own right.

So what I often think about is if she had that tenure-track position, how many more lives she would have reached in those classes. Her legacy though, is the work that she has produced and, therefore, the historians study and cite her in their work today.

JE: During the Depression, everything was cut back in education.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Her pay was cut back.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: The thing we like about Angie Debo is she could have given up.

PL: Right.

JE: There are many times she could have said, "Okay, I'm just not going to do anything." And I hope that this will be an example to young people to never give up. She never gave up. And maybe she entered periods of depression. I don't know if you know that or not. Is that true?

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives). Yes, I would agree with you and say yes. She experienced periods of depression. And through family support and through fellowships and grants she would be very frugal with her resources, she would live at home, she would continue her research and her writing, with the support of her parents and then her mother, to tell those stories, to share those stories.

Chapter 05 – 1:25
Her Personality

John Erling: So now we're talking, she's in her upper twenties?

Patricia Loughlin: I think back to the '30s when she is working at West Texas and continuing to work on her graduate degree at the University of Oklahoma. And she would be in her forties?

JE: Okay, that old.

PL: I'm curious about these questions though, because what do you think is going on when others are getting promoted and she's not?

JE: Well, I think there are two things. The way they viewed women, shall we say, in the workplace, or in the history department.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: And then I think you said earlier that in West Texas there were a couple of women named above her.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: So then you begin to look, "All right, well, does this woman have a personality issue?"

PL: Okay.

JE: That's what I'm wondering.

PL: I think about that and I would add to it that she was also pursuing her PhD. And others may or may not have their PhD or the desire to get the PhD. And then when this PhD is produced she writes this excellent dissertation; it becomes her first book. It wins a National American Historical Association prize for the best book in US history.

So that is the kind of quality we're talking about. That kind of personality, that kind of quality of work could be considered very threatening to her colleagues and maybe to her supervisors.

JE: Okay, good point. Her work could have been threatening, it wasn't just her personality. And I'm glad you pointed that out.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

Chapter 06 – 2:42
A New Interpretation

John Erling: So she works on her doctorate at the University of Oklahoma. Then the history of the Choctaw from the perspective of Choctaw people—

Patricia Loughlin: Absolutely, yes.

JE: Is that how she really starts?

PL: Yes. So she's talking to her mentor, Dale, and Dale talks to her and asks her to consider taking a look at the Choctaw National Records, looking at the collection at the University of Oklahoma. And then records are also available at the Oklahoma Historical Society. She gets into the records and she realizes this is an incredible story that needs to be told. And from there, from that first dissertation, first book, and then beyond, you really see the focus on American Indian history, Oklahoma history, history of the American West.

JE: At that time, most historians were writing from a non-Indian perspective.

PL: Right. You're using government documents, you're using newspapers to tell a story of American Indian communities. But what she is understanding in her work is that she needs what we now call Ethno History, where you are bringing in anthropological sources. You are bringing in oral history, you're bringing in oral tradition, you're bringing in Choctaw Nation records, the records of Choctaw politicians to tell the story.

JE: And it was interesting, at the time, I believe, the University of Oklahoma had acquired the Choctaw Council manuscript.

PL: Yes, the Choctaw records, she's using those records and she's bringing those records to bear in the dissertation.

JE: Why do you think other historians didn't do that?

PL: These are wonderful questions to think about and consider. Um (hesitation sound), at the time, it was called White/Indian Relations and this idea was this is the way you did history, this is the way you put the narrative together. And she thought, "There's something more that could be going on here and that the sources are so much richer." The narrative is so much deeper when you bring in Native sources and tell the story from the Native perspective. And it's true, it's true.

A larger literature will tell us that women were doing this, women scholars were doing this much earlier than men were doing this kind of work. She was willing to take risks, she was willing to offer a new interpretation, as we said, as the precursor to the new Indian history and ethno history, bringing in a variety of sources and then defending those sources. We're so thankful for her contributions because these are the texts that we continue to use today to learn more about American Indian history in Oklahoma and the American West.

Chapter 07 – 3:04
Scholar Advocate

John Erling: This is a little interesting sidebar because of her personality. When she's working on her thesis and Dr. Dale is her mentor in that, her guidance counselor, in other words—

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives), yes.

JE: …she often argued with him.

PL: Yes.

JE: Is that natural to have, "Well, I don't agree with you"? Or do you think there was a personality clash? Tell us about that.

PL: So in general, following a traditional line, you treat your mentor with respect. And unless the mentor is going to invite debates you listen, take notes, and follow the plan. But I smile because I think, "That's who she was." And we love her for it and we're thankful for her drive and her commitment to recording the truth that she wanted to debate. You see this continue throughout her life because other manuscripts that she would produce, she would want to debate with the readers, she would want to debate with the editors, she would want to go back for a new addition for a book and correct the errors. She really wanted to get it right, so yes, she believed in the power of debate.

JE: Also the position she would choose sometimes put her at odds against some Oklahomans in some serious legal matters as well.

PL: Yes.

JE: I mean, she was always on that side, wasn't she?

PL: Yes, and I would say she was a scholar activist. She was an activist, she was an advocate for civil rights, for the rights of American Indian people, and for all of those reasons young people today need to study Angie Debo.

JE: So then comes time for her written and oral exams. Is there a story there?

PL: Sure, she's still in West Texas, she's working in West Texas. She wants to do well in her exams and she's trying to kind of dictate to Dale and her committee that, "I want to come up and I want to take my writtens and my orals and I want to do it all together, and then I want to go back to my job."

And they're kind of saying to their graduate student, "You need to take a little time. You need to do the written exams and then you need to take a little break so we can review them, and then you'll have your orals later." I think they came to an agreement, but the idea is she was trying to come up with her own plan of the way these exams were going to go. And in academia you should probably just follow the plan of the committee.

JE: So then she'd come to Norman and then in two days did—yeah.

PL: Yes, yes, so she did it with a twist and she continued to kind of operate that way for the rest of her life.

JE: So then she gets her degree.

PL: Yes she does.

JE: Didn't she find out that in West Texas they wouldn't renew her contract?

PL: Yes.

JE: So after she gets her degree they won't renew her contract.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Do we know why that happened?

PL: So this must be when she is at West Texas Teachers College.

JE: Yeah.

PL: And she's working in the demonstration school and this may also be at the time when she's working in the museum where she continues to work for the museum a year or two. And then they part ways and she will kind of focus on her writing and supporting herself in a variety of ways through fellowships, grants, contracts.

Chapter 08 – 3:52
Breaking New Ground

John Erling: So in the early '30s, 1934, then, was a significant year for her because then her book *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, which was an outgrowth of her dissertation, comes out. Talk about that.

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives). The publication process is successful, this book comes out, mostly positive reviews. And as I said, this book will receive the Dunning Prize by the American Historical Association. So she receives national, if not international, praise for this early success in her first book.

And yet, another woman that we've mentioned today, a woman scholar, Muriel Wright, has questions in her book review, even the title. She didn't like the idea of the rise and fall. She would suggest another title, so you can kind of see how some of these perspectives are challenged among the women that we're talking about here.

JE: But didn't she pick titles that she knew would be catching?

PL: Yes.

JE: I mean, she was a public relations woman too.

PL: Yes, oh yes, yes she was.

JE: *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, that might catch somebody's attention rather than *Here's a History of the Choctaw People*.

PL: You're right, you're right, yeah, she had a flare with her writing and she did believe in the power of a compelling title.

JE: You referred to ethnology and then there's ethno history.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: They have pointed to this book as one of the early examples using that. Talk to us about what is that?

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives). When you look at the sources that she's using to tell this story she is going to use a variety of sources that you may not find in other work at the same time period of the '30s. So she's going to be looking at the traditional sources, traditional being the work of historians who have come before her and federal government, the government documents, newspapers. But she's also going to incorporate, as you said, the Choctaw Council records, the Choctaw national records, and she's going to also include oral histories and oral tradition in the 1930s to tell this story.

JE: And nobody had done that.

PL: And that's new, that is new.

JE: Sometimes we can't believe that but I'm sure there'll be good people looking back at our times that would go, "Duh, we can't believe they thought the way they thought." So—

PL: Right, right, right.

JE: ...you know, we have to forgive them.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: So she's breaking ground.

PL: Absolutely.

JE: Yet, she never obtained a tenure-track position at any college.

PL: No, she did not. You could also say, "Well, she was the Maps librarian at Oklahoma State University. Those would be faculty positions but not the kind of tenure-track positions in history that she so desired.

JE: So while she's getting national attention her work at West Texas was problematic. She had relationship there with a Dr. Sheffy, which was quite contentious. And Dr. Sheffy, what was his position there?

PL: If I recall, Dr. Sheffy is the department chair.

JE: And he wouldn't invite her to lectures by visiting scholars.

PL: Right, so she feels a personal snub and maybe he's thinking of, "Well, I don't necessarily want to invite all of my colleagues." So it's very disappointing. At the same time, I'm thinking about her scholarship and her contributions and winning these national awards at the same time. Yes, it's disappointing what's going on in those relationships.

JE: It was a lonely life. You talked about her in the museum.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: It was a humiliating experience for her.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: You get this national attention about a book and then they treat me like—

PL: Right. And I know she was an excellent professor. I see pictures of her time at West Texas. She's also taking students out in the field, she's taking them to Palo Duro Canyon, she's teaching them how to hunt and how to camp and doing all of these things and talking about the American West in the outdoors. And all of that is compelling to me.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 09 – 4:16
A Talented Historian

John Erling: She returns to her home in Marshall in the summer of 1934, and she was forty-four years old at that time.

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: So the good fight is on at that age. She continues then, while she's at home, to pursue teaching positions without any success.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: She makes a plea to Dr. Dale at the University of Oklahoma. And I want to go to your book here, page 89. I just want to read this because I think it is choice, as she wrote to him. She says, "The successful books I have written have typed and labeled me still further. I have really done better work in other history fields than many of the people who have specialized in them. But because my books about Indians have been so outstanding people assume that I am ignorant of all other subjects. I'm writing so fully because I hope you can help me. I know that people who can hold the attention of a college class and inspire students to enter into research and writing are too plentiful, even in the overcrowded history field. And it seems to me there should be a place where my talents could be used. I am not desperate or discouraged for I can always find things to do, but I am not satisfied to waste the best of my gifts."

PL: Yes.

JE: That's Angie Debo.

PL: Yes it is, yes it is, it's all right there. She knew that she was a talented historian. She knew she was excellent in the classroom, and she was requesting and sometimes pleading with

Dale to help her secure those tenure-track positions. And sadly, in my research, I'm seeing that he would do more for his other graduate students, mostly men, than he would for her.

JE: Of course, there was this thing that I guess some colleges, women's colleges began hiring men over women because they felt like men had families to support.

PL: Right. So this is the 1930s, the idea of the traditional family, the male breadwinner, women working for pin money. But what we know when we look back is not all women are working for pin money, right? And women and single women and scholars need to support themselves. But the idea during the 1930s was that these jobs should go largely to men.

JE: And isn't it true that some women did not get married because they'd say, "Well, you've got a husband that will support you." They remained single so they could get hired!

PL: Yes, it was going on. And so these women, the women that I'm looking at, all of them remained single. All of them remained intentionally single for a variety of reasons, whether it was a commitment to the work, they knew what they might be giving up if they did decide to marry. So they could not have it all. They could not put it all together and make it work. They chose to remain single.

JE: Yeah. And we've got to remember, she wasn't the only one as a female, there was a whole host of women that were trying to get into the field as she was.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm, um-hmm, um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: And her friend, Dr. Dale at OU, could have given her a job.

PL: Yes.

JE: And didn't he hire some females over her?

PL: He may have hired some women, but I also know that he hired some men who were also his graduate students who didn't have books out, who were not as qualified as Debo, and he hired them over her.

JE: So by the mid '40s, only one woman had taught in the OU history department. Maybe that is one area that she decides, "All right, they're never going to hire me in the history department so I'll be a writer."

PL: You know, in general, it's tough to think that you're going to get at the institution where you received your degree. Some people are fortunate to do that, most of us are not. At the same time, when we're talking sort of negatively about her mentor, Dale, she also had the utmost respect for him. They had a very significant relationship and connection throughout their lives. When she would meet with him she had he deepest respect for him.

JE: Even though?

PL: Even though, she still respected him deeply.

Chapter 10 –1:48
And Still the Waters Run

John Erling: She does publish a very important study on American Indian history, the book *And Still the Waters Run*.

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Can you give me a little overview of that book?

PL: *And Still the Waters Run*, she started working on this immediately after she completed her dissertation. So she started this project and she's exploring the five tribes in her work and looking at how the tribal government structure was dissolved and the allotment structure and that transitional moment.

What's interesting to me, when I talk to people about her work and her significance and her contributions today is that Cherokee Nation and the communities in Cherokee Nation refer to *And Still the Waters Run* as the bible. As the bible because this is a living text that is used as documentation for people to reclaim or retain their lands. So the work that she did in the 1930s that was published in the 1940s is so important to today's citizens as they are reclaiming or retaining their lands. And I have to think, you know, you're an historian and you're engaged in this work and you're writing this work, would she have any idea in the 1930s the significance of her work today and how it lives and breathes today?

JE: Yeah, amazing. So rather than writing complimentary histories of Oklahoma and the people she chose to observe or write about the damaging effects. We talk about the conquest of the American West.

PL: Right.

JE: Well, there was a lot of damage that went over that conquest and that it left in its wake.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 11 – 5:35
Grafters

John Erling: In the book, she talks about the political corruption—

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: …and grafters, Sooners, mistreatment of American Indians and how they stole allotments from Indians that were so innocent and they took advantage of them. Nobody had written like that, is that right?

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative). Right, right. And it's a complicated story because the grafters that she identifies, it is not just a White/Native story, some of the grafters that we're talking about might be Native, might have families who are Native. And we're talking about children, in many ways, and orphans and those who are going to supervise their landholdings and many of those supervisors will take advantage and profit from this transitional moment that's going on. And that's what she's talking about in her draft and in her early manuscript, she names names. She talks about everything that she finds and, for those reasons, she has difficulty publishing the text and it takes quite a bit of time before that text will be published.

JE: Here's a quote from your book *Hidden Treasures*, her quote, "I didn't know that all of eastern Oklahoma and Oklahoma in general was dominated by a criminal conspiracy to cheat Indians out of their land after their own tribes were broken up into individual allotments."

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: She referred to the "orgy of exploitation."

PL: That would make a great book title.

JE: Yes it would. I mean, the very thought to say it that way—

PL: Yes.

JE: …is almost beyond belief. And the liquidating of the five civilized tribes was, "a gigantic blunder." She got some pushback, perhaps, on that. And she exposed the grafters by name, didn't she?

PL: Yes.

JE: And that's where she really got pushback when it came to publishing. Why?

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: What about these names?

PL: These names, and I hope you're not going to ask me to name names or identify them. Maybe you have some names there, but these are prominent names in Oklahoma history. Although others may know the story, so although Dale may know the story, he may even talk about it in his lectures, he was also a political person who knew the importance of donor relations at the University of Oklahoma. So he may say, "You know what? You may not want to publish this or you may not want to name the names." She had nothing to lose. She wasn't fundraising for a university. She wasn't trying to have a certain kind of reputation. So she was so focused on this idea to discover the truth and publish it and that's what she did.

JE: Well, I thought, "Hmm (thoughtful sound), who are those people?" So I went to her book, which I have here. Page 204, "Early in 1909, the government instituted a criminal prosecution and Governor Charles Haskell, Clarence W. Turner, Walter R. Eden, William T. Hutchings, Albert Z. English, Frederick B. Severs, and Jesse Hill, all prominent citizens of Muskogee, were indicted for conspiracy to defraud the Creek Nation." So that—

PL: Yes.

JE: …is where the University of Oklahoma Press said, "Wooo, this is pretty hot stuff."

PL: Yes. So how do we tell the story of our wonderful state of Oklahoma? Do we only talk about the positives? Do we talk about a more balanced approach in trying to talk about Haskell and others and all of the aspects of Governor Haskell? What kind of story are we trying to tell in the development of our state? And I would also add here, when I think about the story of Oklahoma, I do think about it in many ways as Oklahoma exceptionalism, because where else are you finding the joining of two territories, Oklahoma Territory, Indian Territory, bringing them together in the state of Oklahoma, 1907, and what is that transition like? How do you bring people together?

The story of Native peoples coming to Oklahoma, some were here, many were brought here, forcibly removed here. It's a very complicated story but I think we need to keep learning about it, writing about it, talking about it.

JE: She said the research for *And Still Waters Run Deep* was one of the most unhappy experiences of her life and she called the evidence "slimy."

PL: Yes.

JE: Slimy.

PL: Slimy. I would say that the editor at OU Press, Brant, he believed in the book, her championed the book, he supported her work. They sent it out for review, received some positive reviews, but the idea of naming names might be problematic. When he took a new position at Princeton University Press, then she was able to publish the book.

JE: And then there was a reprint, as I see, and ultimately, was printed by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1984.

PL: Yes.

JE: Isn't that amazing?

PL: Yes it is amazing. It is amazing.

JE: Because, isn't it true that when the book finally came out it was four or five years after she had written it?

PL: Right, so she was writing the book in the 1930s but it will not appear in print until the 1940s.

JE: So she expected some immediate backlash and she didn't get it and thought, "I guess some of the grafters don't read books."

PL: Right. And some descendants of grafters, she would give these public talks and she would expect to receive some pushback and she will say that she did not receive a lot of pushback from the work.

Chapter 12 – 3:16
W.P.A.

John Erling: She also worked on W.P.A. projects, Works Progress Administration projects.
Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm (affirmative).
JE: I always thought it was building walls and bridges and roads and all that kind of thing, but there were writing projects that came about from Franklin Roosevelt's W.P.A. projects.
PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives). Yes, so Great Depression in the 1930s, and the Works Progress Administration also has the federal theater project, the federal artist project, the federal writers project, so putting out of work historians to work in a variety of ways. So we have some wonderful resources now because of the work going on in the 1930s. I think about the oral histories that were conducted with former slaves, the slave narratives project. And in her case here, she's working on a large state project. She's working with the Oklahoma Historical Society through the federal writers project, they're working on a large book project that's talking about roads in our state and historic sites in our state and places to visit.
JE: A guidebook—
PL: A guidebook.
JE: …that she wrote to promote travel.
PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).
JE: She was a promoter.
PL: Right.
JE: *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State*. Then she got another job writing the history of the Creeks.
PL: Yes.
JE: That became a book, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians*. Didn't she get some pushback, maybe, from the Creeks because they didn't like *The Road to Disappearance*?
PL: Right. So if we're looking for those good titles, those catchy titles, some people, and Native people in these cases, will say, "Why the negative? Why the decline in the title, when we want to be thinking about the positive and the resilience of our nation?"
JE: I think she said the Creeks were conservative, kept to themselves, "Their inner history was hidden until I uncovered it." Did they come around to embrace it, do you think, the Creeks?
PL: These texts are so important to Native communities today. We have incredible Native scholars who continue the work, who are building on the work that she started.

JE: Yeah. We should also point out, on her book, *And Still the Waters Run Deep*, she was barred from teaching in the state of Oklahoma.

PL: So you're saying after *And Still the Waters Run*—

JE: Yes.

PL: …appears in the '40s, but by the '50s, she is no longer looking for those tenure-track positions. I don't know if I would say barred, I would say she was unsuccessful in her attempt to secure tenure-track positions anywhere in the country. By the 1950s, she decides, "I prefer writing. I want to dedicate my life to research and writing." And so Oklahoma State University provides her with the opportunity to become the Maps librarian.

The wonderful thing about the Maps librarian position at the time is that she had an office in the library and she could focus on her writing. So she would help people with maps and answer queries from time to time, but largely, she got to use the archives and she got to spend her time doing what she loved most, which is writing.

JE: Right, and presenting a history of the conquest, these European whites coming.

PL: Yeah.

JE: But on the exploitation of the Native Americans.

PL: Yes.

Chapter 13 – 3:06
Grapes of Wrath

John Erling: Then she published the book, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, in 1953. Then *Prairie City: The Story of an American Community* in 1944.

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm, um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: That sounds intriguing to me. Tell me about it.

PL: What's wonderful about both of those texts, you see that she's starting to go in a new direction in some of her writings. So she's writing about American Indian history and it's included in the history of Tulsa. But she's also talking about what you'd referred to as the pioneer spirit, and she's talking about Marshall or towns like Marshall in *Prairie City*.

What's fun to think about with *Prairie City* is it's a story of small towns in Oklahoma, in Kansas, and then Marshall really begins to celebrate *Prairie City*, the book, through an annual event called Prairie City Days. And for a number of years, Angie Debo was the special guest at Prairie City Days. The town, and other citizens would come together to celebrate her and to celebrate pioneer communities.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). Isn't *Prairie City*, the novel, based on history?

PL: Yes, very much so. She's using some of her research and she's pulling together stories that she has heard from residents to tell the story of small town life.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: You see her humor in there and you see many of her own impressions of growing up in this place.

JE: And while she had books that were nationally known and acclaimed she had no fear of pointing out books that were nationally known that she did not approve of. *Cimarron*, the novel, Edna Ferber's *Cimarron*—

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Was based on the development in Oklahoma after the land rush. She thought that was a poor representation of Oklahoma?

PL: Uh-huh (affirmative), a romanticized view of Oklahoma, someone who hadn't spent a lot of time here. And I also think about John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*.

JE: Okay.

PL: Angie Debo and others would say, "These types of texts do not tell the story of Oklahoma," and they do not want to claim them as such. So although John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and Edna Ferber's *Cimarron* are well-known documentation that are connected to Oklahoma, Angie Debo and others would not embrace those.

JE: And she had company in that.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Our own David Boren's father, who was a congressman from this state, US congressman, Lyle Boren, he enters his opinion in the congressional record that the novel was a lie, "a black infernal creation of a twisted, distorted mind."

PL: Yes. I think Governor George Nye and others in the 1980s, '90s, would say those kinds of stereotypes about Okies and Arkies that you read about in *Grapes of Wrath* continue in many ways today. And that we're still combating those and it's important to think about and discuss, especially with our young people, to be proud of their state's history and where they come from. And that those texts from outsiders do not represent them.

Chapter 14 – 3:45
Oklahoma Character

John Erling: Did she think that the character of an Oklahoman, the character, the spirit—

Patricia Loughlin: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: ...was different from even neighboring states, from Kansas, from Texas, and Colorado? Did she think that the Oklahoma character was unique?

PL: I think she did think it was. And here's where she would agree with Dale, that if you're talking about several generations of settlement coming together they would both agree that Oklahoma is different because some of these things could happen in one generation. But then Oklahoma character and Oklahoma spirit, hard work, resilience, advancement, friendliness, compassion, community, I think in many ways today a lot of people would agree that's distinctly Oklahoman.

JE: Right. And be proud of that.

PL: Be proud of it, um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: We know of Texans that are just so proud of being a Texan and we are proud but we're not as "I am so proud to be an Oklahoman!"

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: You kind of wonder the difference between those two spirits.

PL: Humble.

JE: Yeah.

PL: Oklahomans are humble and friendly. And that was on display, right, following Oklahoma City bombing?

JE: Yeah.

PL: And then 9/11, and what we call the Oklahoma standard, the Oklahoma way. People know Oklahoma and the people of Oklahoma for friendliness, compassion, and the giving spirit.

JE: You could say there were two Debos.

PL: Right.

JE: Why were there two Debos?

PL: Historian Patricia Nelson Limerick, very creative writer of western history, would talk about these two Debos and that one is very much in command of a focus on American Indian history, and to discover the truth and publish it at all costs.

And then the other Debo was almost a booster Debo who would write *Prairie City* and would write some texts talking more about a pioneering, settling spirit. But in many ways we can reconcile the Debos and put them altogether in one complicated package—she did it all. She did it all. She lived a full life. As I said, she was a scholar activist. She continued to remain active throughout the course of her life and she would write annual letters to people about issues, especially American Indian issues. A champion for social justice and a scholar activist.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). She was eighty-five years old when she wrote her last history book.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Eighty-five!

PL: Yes.

JE: Let's think of that. Did she ever have any health issues along the way?

PL: She would travel from time to time, she took care of her mother for a period of time. She was very small, tiny, but with fiery spirit and a commanding voice in her public lectures. I don't know if I can speak so much to her health issues, but she started to slow down later and she would have Marshall residents like Jerry Shafer and others who would drive her to her public talks and to her public moments.

JE: And we think about she went through all that, she never gave up, and now Oklahoma reveres her spirit and we want more and more people to know about it because when I tell people I'm interviewing about Angie Debo nobody knows her name.

PL: Really?

JE: Really.

PL: Really?

JE: Maybe I'm hanging out with the wrong kind of people. But her portrait hangs in our state capitol.

PL: I'm glad you mentioned that.

JE: Right.

PL: Because that was the first thing I was going to say there.

JE: Right.

PL: Yes.

JE: It was painted by Charles Banks Wilson, who I have interviewed for this oral history website, who was one of my favorite interviews because he was so sarcastic and he wore red socks and I just loved him. But he painted her and it honors her for tackling these political and controversial subjects that others avoided.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 15 – 3:00
Children's Book

Patricia Loughlin: I'm learning more about the story as I'm putting together this children's book, but the two individuals writing the foreword to the children's book are Penny Williams and Robert Henry, and they were both state senators at the time. This was in the late 1970s, early '80s, during the Equal Rights Amendment discussion. The two of them came together and really championed this idea to recognize women's history, to commission a portrait, and to select Angie Debo as the first one. Because of all the work

that she did to promote social justice in the state of Oklahoma. So the two of them came together to make this happen, and here's a little bit of Angie Debo's humor. When they had the unveiling of the portrait at the capitol Angie called it her public hanging. I love that.

John Erling: You referred to a children's book.

PL: Yes.

JE: Is that what we're talking about here? What I'm holding here?

PL: Yes, yes.

JE: You gave me a manuscript of it.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: This is the children's book. When was that published?

PL: This project has been going on for a number of years, but I'm pleased to say that the book will be out this summer with the Oklahoma Heritage Association.

JE: There were a number of people who were influenced by her, writers were influenced by her.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: Larry McMurtry was influenced by her.

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: We know him from novels, *The Last Picture Show*, *Terms of Endearment*, and *Lonesome Dove*?

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: He found her book in a parking lot when he was thirteen years old in Wichita Falls, Texas. He picked it up and he started reading it, *The Road to Disappearance* was the book, I have it here.

PL: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: *The Road to Disappearance: The History of the Creek Indians,* he found it in a parking lot and, bingo, it opened his eyes and—

PL: Fantastic to think about her reach and her influence.

JE: Right, right.

PL: Because he's such a compelling writer, embraced by so many in his tellings of western history and it's nice to know that her work influenced his own.

JE: I don't know if there's any other writers you may know off the top of your head? There have to be many that have been inspired by her.

PL: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives), whether they took her Oklahoma History class at Oklahoma State University or they would send their manuscripts to her for review and feedback, she touched so many lives. So many historians lives and people who were active in the ACLU, so I guess I'm surprised when you say that people you talk to still don't know who she is.

JE: Oh yeah!

PL: I think we have more work to do, but I'd like to believe that more and more Oklahomans do know who she is and that they claim her as the state's historian.

JE: Stillwater Public Library put up a statue.

PL: It's wonderful. So in front of the Stillwater Public Library we have this bronze sculpture of Angie Debo and the idea is that we celebrate her and we encourage young people in the public to know more about her, to read her books, to study Oklahoma history.

Chapter 16 – 3:38
Angie's Advice

John Erling: Why did you choose Angie Debo for your book? There are three ladies here and maybe sometime we can talk about those ladies as well.

Patricia Loughlin: Okay.

JE: But Angie has caught my attention for many years. What was it about her?

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative). Uh (hesitation sound), I've always been interested in women's history and learning more about and sharing the stories of women. And what compels me about Angie Debo is her commitment to research, to telling compelling stories. And as you said, to never give up. So yes, her life is very full. There are highs and lows and she is a wonderful study of a life when we are looking for models and we are looking for young people to study so that they can see what hard work and dedication and contributions can do. I really think it's important for people to know that a book she wrote in the 1930s and was published in 1940s, *And Still the Waters Run*, has such significance and importance today, as very much a living text that is used in court cases today for Cherokee Nation citizens.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

PL: That, that's profound.

JE: Yeah it is very profound. I want you to channel Angie Debo here because, and maybe you've already answered it, I always ask at the end of an interview, "What advice do we give to young people who maybe want to be writers, want to be historians like you are to Native Americans who listen to this and say, 'Well, I need to read about this.' "

PL: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: What would Angie Debo say to them right now?

PL: I think she would ask them to join her. I think she would encourage them to write more, to share their work, to speak up in class, to ask questions, to take advantage of opportunities that your teachers provide to you, or your parents, or your community members, to get out there and visit places in the state of Oklahoma and think about the history of our state and be proud of it. She would also encourage people to get out of Oklahoma sometimes and to travel throughout the country and visit places in the world when you have the

opportunity. And she would say, "Live a full life, ask questions, speak up, share your expertise with others, and do not give up."

JE: I was going to say that, "And don't back down," right?

PL: That's right.

JE: So if I asked Angie Debo how she should be remembered, what would her answer be?

PL: I think she would ask us to remember her through the written word. She would ask us to read her books, to study her life, to come visit her in the capitol, to bring children, to bring students, and to bring the public to visit her in the capitol and think about her story. To read her work.

JE: Well, I want to thank you, Patty Loughlin, Dr. Patricia Loughlin, for telling us this story. I wanted to do this because books are great, but in this day and age, to catch the attention right now you tell somebody about a website. "Oh, I can click on."

PL: Yes, yes.

JE: You tell somebody about this book, "Go to McFarlin Library."

"Oh, really?"

PL: Right.

JE: You know.

PL: Right.

JE: So we're using technology today to lift the story of Angie and others so that everybody can hear about it and be proud that this was an Oklahoman who wrote so eloquently about our state and our beloved Native Americans.

PL: Absolutely. And thank you for the opportunity today, John, and thank you for inviting me to join you in this conversation for Voices of Oklahoma.

Chapter 17 – 7:24
And Still the Waters Run Kickback

John Erling: And now on the following chapters we're able to hear the voice of Angie Debo as she talks about her work as an historian. Thanks to the Oklahoma State University archive, Edmond Law Library. And the recording you will hear was made December 16, 1981, when Angie was ninety-one years old.

Angie Debo: We were talking about *And Still the Waters Run*—

Female: Yes.

AD: ...and how I expected that the whole voice of condemnation throughout Oklahoma would be raised against me and every attempt would be made to destroy me, the same as those

people who had destroyed Kate Bernard and others who had at—who had attempted to stop their wholesale exploitation of the Indians. But I think I told you that I didn't hear a word from them.

Female: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AD: But I should and that I had—that Oklahoma had been very good to me, had given me a great deal of credit, more than I deserved, really, for everything that I've done, and no condemnation for anything that they disapproved of.

I think I should have told you, and this is rather, a rather personal thing, but I, it's not, it can't be confidential because it's, it's widely-known, I mean, it appeared in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, and so anybody can read it there. That Muriel Wright was deeply offended at something I said about her granddaughter and that she did object very strongly.

Now I admired Allen Wright very much, her grandfather, who was the chief of the Choctaws, and who had a very interesting life. And I think inspired what I'm going to tell you now. I think he was a good man and I was seriously shocked, Miss Wright would never have known how shocked and distressed I was when I found out that after the Civil War when a dedication for the Choctaw Nation and the Chickasaw Nation—they made the treaty together—went to Washington to make their treaty to settle their relations with the United States that had been interrupted by the war. Then there was a division of attorney's fees, a kickback, and it was true, there was no doubt that it was true. And he was a member of the delegation. At that time, he was not chief but he came, became chief soon after. And I think was really a statesman-like administrator. And I was really very unhappy when I found that he did that.

It was a very successful treaty. The Choctaws and the Chickasaws made the best treaty than any of the five tribes made at the close of the war. And, and they paid the, uh (hesitation sound), so the records stated, they paid the attorney that they employed a hundred thousand dollars. And he passed back fifty thousand, which was divided among the Choctaw delegates.

Now I don't know were the Chickasaws involved or not and Allen Wright was one of the delegates. And he participated in this kickback. Well, I just felt that I had to tell it, it wouldn't be a true story of the negotiations if I left out essential facts. And so I didn't put it in there, and then, Miss Wright, who adored her grandfather and, of course, had known him during her childhood while he was alive, was terribly offended.

Now I had had, and still have, a great admiration for Muriel Wright. I think she was a very fine historian, and I have always given her credit for her fine historical research and the articles that she contributed to *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, before she became editor and afterwards, and other things that she wrote. And especially that book of hers, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*. I have used that book, it's an extremely important

book. So I admire Miss Wright very much, but she became violently offended. She couldn't understand, I'm sure, that I had to tell the whole story.

And she went to, to, uh (hesitation sound), Grant Foreman and to consult him. He was an attorney, of course, besides being a fine historian. She went to Grant Foreman and asked him about a libel suit, and he told her that it wouldn't be to her advantage to pursue her libel suit.

Now Grant Foreman told me that. The account was in the, the decision of the Supreme Court, it was right there in the Supreme Court records.[She coughed] Excuse me. And anybody could find it. And so she wrote a very hostile review of the book, which appeared in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. I read it once, I read it at the time. I wasn't at that time a subscriber to *The Chronicles*. I was having a pretty hard financial trouble and I wasn't a member of the Oklahoma Historical Society, so I just read it once back in the, about 1936, or about 1940. I read it once and I haven't read it since.

But there were times when Miss Wright seemed to be friendly. And I always felt friendly toward her because I could understand how she felt. And I had such an admiration for her as an historian. But there were times when she didn't like me and that story in *The Chronicles* was a, I mean, it was really a book review that she wrote with several pages. They were just about as hostile as anything could possibly be.

And I thought, perhaps, when I told you that Oklahoma had been good to me and not attacking me for any of the truth I told. I thought I opened up that and I should have told you.

Chapter 18 – 5:00
Native Americans and Angie

Angie Debo: You also asked me how the Indians felt about my work? And I said that the Indians were just altogether friendly. And I forgot in that case about Miss Wright and, perhaps, I don't know of anybody except Miss Wright and her relatives. But perhaps there might have been other Indians like her who were extremely successful leaders as a white man's society, who resented any illusion to the unhappy situation as the full-bloods who had been cheated out of their property and who lived in remote places and in land that nobody wanted, and who suffered from actual hunger and lack of education or opportunities and everything else. They resented that because they felt as though that that, I mean, Miss Wright did, and I know some of her relatives did. I don't know that any other Indians did, but I thought, perhaps, I should modify what I said about Indians.

And there was a relative of Miss Wright's who wrote a very hostile review or letter, which was published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* about the result of a survey that I made to the full-blood settlements in which I had stated frequently and clearly that there were leaders of, of in the economic and, uh (hesitation sound), professional and, uh (hesitation sound), and, uh (hesitation sound), and intellectual life of Oklahoma who were members of the five tribes. But that there was that unhappy group back in the hills. They resented that, they seemed to feel, although I had made it clear that not all Indians were living in those subhuman conditions, I made it very clear. But they, she and this relative of hers, seemed to resent it. They seemed to think that it was a sort of an attack on the position that Indians occupied in Oklahoma, which it clearly was not. And they did resent that.

But I do not know how extensive that resentment was. I do know that I found that this article that went to *The Chronicles* should be answered. I never have answered a review except that one time, because I feel as though that a reviewer is almost always an authority on that particular subject. And the reviewer puts his own reputation on the line just as much as the writer has done. And the writer has his book, there he is, that anybody can read, which is his defense. And the reviewer, again, he's responsible. And I feel as though it's not necessary for the writer to defend himself if he gets an unfair review.

But that letter misrepresented what I had made so clear about the leadership of the fine group of five tribes Indians. People like me are alright, for instance. And he represented that so much that I did feel as though I should answer it. So I think maybe I should have clarified that to say that I have had some kickback from Indians, but not very much.

Those are the only instances that I know, and I always, I always gave Miss Wright full credit for her achievements. And sometimes she was a rather, uh (hesitation sound), well, she was a rather emotional person in a way, I think, and sometimes she was very friendly to me. And when she was I always was exactly like, and when she wasn't, why, I understood the reason for it.

Chapter 19 – 3:00
Interest in Native Americans

Angie Debo: I could write up a very pretty story about how I was interested in Indians was the reason I started writing about them. Because my grandfather had joined the gold rush to California and I grew up on when I crossed the plains to California. He left Independence, Missouri, and followed that northern trail. And Indians, it was a time of peace on the plains,

and so Indians were oppressed and he was extremely interested in them. And he told me and my brother, he told us many stories about his contacts with Indians.

And he never said any, an Indian though, he always said a Shoshone or a Soo or a Delaware, or as came to the camp. He, uh (hesitation sound), the signals between the Indians, he knew them apart, he did run into an Indian war in northern Nevada. After he was at Great Salt Lake and come across northern Nevada, he ran into an Indian war, which didn't affect the company which he had joined in Independence, Missouri, but did affect another company that they had contact with very much. But except for that his contacts with the Indians was friendly.

And of course, I was there, interested in it. And when I was nine years old, and came to Oklahoma, I hoped I'd see some Indians and I was very disappointed because I didn't. Because all I saw was homesteaders. And maybe a few cowboys who had become homesteaders.

So when Dr. Dale suggested that I write about the Choctaws the only reason I took up that subject was just because there was some material there for a dissertation.

Now I think maybe I had better go on with what I had started about my reasons for writing books. I told you when you were here last week, I believe, I told you that I always chose a subject that I didn't know anything about. And when I quit my work at Canyon and started to write a book I was entirely unaware of what I'd write about, and didn't decide until I went Norman and sort of talked to the *University Press* people and so on. And that was true all the way through.

Chapter 20 – 4:20
Creeks and Tulsa

Angie Debo: Now after I wrote *And Still Waters Run*, and before it was published, during that four years that the *University Press* was trying to find a publisher I got another granting aid from the Social Science Research Council and wrote a history of the Creeks. Now my only reason for writing a history of the Creeks was because I didn't know anything about the Creeks. And nobody else did either. The Creek history was a complete blank from the time that they settled in Oklahoma until the end of the tribal period—their history was just almost a complete blank. And if anybody tried to write about them he was so unaware of the situation in the Creek Nation that what he wrote was not accurate at all. It was just as though a person would try to write a biography of George Washington that had never heard about the Revolution and didn't know anything at all about the United States, had never heard of the United States. It would be, if you worked hard to try to find out the events in

George Washington's life he wouldn't give a very good interpretation of those with his lack of a background. So whatever was written about the Creeks lacked that background.

And that's the reason why, the only reason why I chose to write about the Creeks. And I remember thinking that because the Choctaws were peaceful and using the white man's word *progressive*, very anxious to acquire everything the white man had that might help them. The Creeks were warlike and conservative.

Well, I found out later that the Creeks were not as warlike as I had thought they were, they were just good at defending or very earnest at defending themselves. But anyhow, I did think that that would be a tribe that would be different from the Choctaws. So I worked on that history of the Creeks, and I finished it, I believe, in 1939. But that was my reason for choosing it.

Female: And that's *The Road to Disappearance*.

AD: That's *The Road to Disappearance*. And my reason for giving it that kind of a title was that nobody was interested in Indian history at that time. If I had called it *The History of the Creeks*, nobody would have been interested in it at all.

Now there is an interest in Indian history. And if I had just named it *A History of the Creek Nation*, it would be a good title, but that would not have been a good title then.

Well, anyhow, that's the reason why I chose that subject of the Creeks. But I, uh (hesitation sound), did so much work and I had so many notes that I could really, I had to condense the things I learned. I had to condense them so extensively to get them into one book, and even so, the book is a little too large to be conveniently handled or to be, to have been economically sold. It was just a little too large.

But I could have written ten or twelve volumes and filled it with the history of the Creeks from the Civil War on. I had that much overflow in my notes, and I still have those notes. And that's the reason why that I wrote about Tulsa. I could have taken any section of the Creek country and have written a book about it, but I didn't feel that there was any section of the Creek country that had any particular interest outside that community except Tulsa. So that's the reason why that I wrote *Tulsa*. I just took the overflow, I took the amount of all of my, uh (hesitation sound), I went through my notes and I pulled out all that had to do with the Tulsa area and used those notes for my history of Tulsa.

Chapter 21 – 3:24
Prairie City

Angie Debo: And I am remembering the difficulty in getting *And Still Waters Run* published because of the names of ordinary grafters and the names of people in high positions who

also were implicated in this unholy business. I thought that if I would write the history of a small town, and the reason why perhaps that I became interested in a small town was that one of the courses I took at, required, maybe I was an undergraduate, I don't know, at the University of Oklahoma, required a biography of one's hometown. And I did learn something about Marshall and that term theme, so I thought it would be nice to write a history of a small town like Marshall. But instead of using the real people that I knew so well in Marshall that I would have fictitious characters. They would all be real people from outside like Dennis Flynn and, and, uh (hesitation sound), Roy Tashon, and so forth. It would all be real people.

But the people in my town would not be real people, they would be fictitious characters, and the events would happen in Marshall or any town. And I, they all happened, but they didn't all happen in Marshall.

Well, I made my application for the fellowship and Mr. Knopf wrote to Dr. Dale and asked him if that would really be a history. And Dr. Dale, of course, said it would, because that was the kind of writing that Dr. Dale liked best. And Dr. Dale didn't like to tell nasty things about living people anyway and make himself unpopular. And so he said, "Yes, that would be a real history."

And so that year I won the History fellowship from Knopf. And that was the reason, that was the reason why that I wrote *Prairie City*. Now Mr. Knopf never objected to but one little item in my book that he felt that I couldn't prove, and I did leave that out willingly. But otherwise, it went just the way that I had written it. And I stated in my Preface, but people don't read the Preface, and I stated in my Preface that it was not the history of my own town, that I put the location and dates and such statistics as population, I used my own town because it was more convenient. But aside from that the events occurred in this part of Oklahoma, except for one or two things that occurred outside, and I mentioned the things that occurred outside.

For instance, about the pony that wouldn't eat corner oats because he got so sick of eating corner oats. He just wanted to be tied out and eat good old prairie grass. Now my mother told that story about western Kansas, but I stated that in the Preface. So that's the reason why that I wrote *Prairie City*.

Chapter 22 – 0:33
Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.