

A Summary of Eastern's History Written in 2001 and Checked in Aug., 2004

EASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE COLLEGE, a two-year community college, provides a broad range of programs, services, and resources. Eastern's main campus is located at Wilburton, the county seat of Latimer County, in a valley between the San Bois and Winding Stair Mountains. Eastern operates a second campus, the Wanda Bass Higher Education Center, in McAlester and a teaching site at the McCurtain County Higher Education Center in Idabel. In addition to associate degrees, technical and certification programs are offered. State programs such as the Oklahoma Department of Corrections Center for Correctional Officer Studies also operate on campus.

The early twentieth-century coal mining industry in southeastern Oklahoma created a need for technical courses in mining and related subjects such as chemistry and math. Oklahoma's first state legislature established the college on May 26, 1908, as the Oklahoma School of Mines and Metallurgy. Local citizens donated sixty acres one mile west of Wilburton. The school opened January 11, 1909, with one hundred students and Dr. George E. Ladd as president. The first graduates received diplomas in 1912.

Although the college had to close briefly due to low enrollment during World War I, the School of Mines (Eastern) continued to add liberal arts programs. The State Legislature renamed and somewhat reorganized the college several times. In 1927, the name was changed to Eastern Oklahoma College, and the mining programs were gradually phased out. The campus, however, still houses the Oklahoma Miner Training Institute, an important reminder of the college's origins. In 1941, the State Legislature put the college under the control of the State Board of Agriculture and renamed it Eastern Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College. Accreditation by North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary

Schools came in March, 1954. In 1972, the college officially became Eastern Oklahoma State College with its own governing board. In the fall, 1998, Eastern's branch campus in McAlester opened. In addition to Eastern classes, other colleges offer courses at the branch campus, thus making it possible to earn bachelor's degrees in McAlester.

Eastern has had distinguished alumni in all areas, from Broadway directors and award-winning artists to prominent athletes, businesspeople, and politicians. Among the alumni are former Oklahoma Governor George Nigh, American Indian artist Merlin Little Thunder, and Dr. Robert Purcell, head of the hepatitis viruses section at the National Institutes of Health. Eastern continues to offer quality and comprehensive instruction in southeastern Oklahoma.

written by Mary Edith Butler

Director of Library Media Services

Bibliography:

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