

# OKLAHOMA PHOTOGRAPHER



**WILLIAM S. PRETTYMAN**  
PHOTOGRAPHER

The photographs capturing the opening of the Cherokee Outlet were taken by his assistants when he decided to enter the land run himself.

**T**he Cherokee Outlet opening also included lands which had belonged to the Tonkawas and Pawnees. It is perhaps the most famous of all the openings, thanks to William S. Prettyman, a frontier photographer from Arkansas City, Kansas. Prettyman had traveled the plains capturing Indian life in photos. After attending the Run of '89 he had taken pictures of the homesteaders, their activities, and the settlements after the Run.

Prettyman devised a scheme to produce the best possible image of the beginning of the land run. He hired men to build a platform on the site of the run. He was careful not to be seen near the construction, since he was a famous photographer. Other photographers might have guessed what he was doing and duplicated his idea.

Prettyman and his employees mounted the platform several minutes before the race and took **candid** shots of the waiting racers. When other photographers saw what Prettyman and his



men were doing, they tried to buy a place for themselves on the raised wooden floor. They were refused.

Just before the starting gun sounded, Prettyman descended the platform and mounted his horse. He had decided to enter the race himself. His employees were instructed to squeeze the bulbs of their cameras at two-second intervals as soon as the race began. Each camera could take only one picture; the technology could not handle more.

Of the four pictures taken, one was destroyed because it was considered no good. One caught the moment the race began, with horses balking and running. Another showed the slower wagons coming behind the horses, and the fourth showed racers fanning out. The only one considered good at that time was the one from the exact beginning of the race. In later years, however, the people thought the blurring in another photo captured the speed of the event. It became one of the most famous images from that era.

Story and pictures are taken from *Franklin's Opus*, by Dr. Ray Miles, and John Lovett, McNeese State University, © *Whispering Winds*. Photos courtesy Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Library, /Prettyman Collection.

**LEFT :** A major concern of reformers and government agents was how to keep “civilized” Indians from going “back to the blanket.” Charlie Grant (seated) appears to be a model of Indian reform in his three-piece suit, boots, necktie, and short hair.

**MIDDLE :** Some time later, Prettyman had the opportunity to photograph Charlie Grant again. After returning to the Osage reservation, Grant had resumed the dress, and, according to Prettyman, the language and customs of his people. Grant is holding an eagle tail fan.

**RIGHT :** Gray Horse is holding a copy of the tribal roll in his left hand and two eagle feathers in his right hand. Note the single eagle feather in his hair, the beaver skin that encases his braids, and the leather-fringed leggings. Gray Horse, Oklahoma, in Osage County is named after him.